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**Making a transition: The development of academics' role and identity in online teaching**

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**Abstract**

This paper explored the journey of three academics as they moved from face-to-face teaching to online teaching over a period of twenty months. From the findings of this study, it is recommended that for an academic to make an effective transition they need to be supported effectively to embrace the changes to their role and to their practice and consequently to their identity. It is hoped that this study may assist in discussions around staff development training and in supporting academics on the transition.

**Keywords**

Academic identity; online teaching; reflexivity; identity development; professional identity.

**Introduction**

For over two decades prevalently, universities have been developing online education as a way of facilitating educational opportunities for those who otherwise may not have the opportunity to gain a higher education (HEA, 2013). Other benefits include reduced costs in staffing and facilities and increased flexibility for staff and students.

This paper starts with the premise that for an academic to make the transition from classroom based teaching to online teaching goes beyond the need for technical competencies; instead, it requires a deep understanding of the nature of the online platform, how it functions and the pedagogical models which can be employed to utilize the platform and learning materials most effectively (Thanaraj & Williams, 2016). Furthermore, it still remains true that technology has the potential to change the way we conduct ourselves, interact with others and how we perceive ourselves (Accenture, 2013).

It is also submitted, from the author's own experience and observation of others in similar teaching roles that the success in implementing and effectively delivering a learning strategy such as through an online medium lies with the academics responsible for the initiative. As such, where a programme of study is delivered online, its success is in part dependent on how well the academics who are designing the programme and teaching on the modules make the transition from the familiar campus-based roles to the more complex role required for facilitating successful online learning. It is important for curriculum designers and tutors to gain an understanding into the changes in academic identity as this shift in teaching takes place and to use that knowledge in the design of online platforms and delivery. It is this new role and identity that is the focus of this paper.

This study investigates how academics define themselves and whether this definition changes when they teach online. In order to undertake this study, the time and support from three participants were enlisted, all of whom are academics teaching on campus across a number of subject disciplines.

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They were interviewed in three intervals – during the time of preparation for online teaching, at the end of the first year of teaching and then twenty months after the start of the online teaching.

### **The academic identity framework**

The paper begins by questioning who is an academic. From my own experience, my role as an academic has changed considerably over the past decade, and the nature of the responsibility being undertaken dictates how we act, how we feel and how we portray ourselves. There is no one definition of what or who an academic is or should be. Academic contracts set out a vast range of responsibilities such as those towards students, contributing towards the subject discipline by way of research, and undertaking administrative and managerial roles (UCU: National Contracts and National staff handbook). In order to understand the concept of identity and how it is formed, this paper utilises Margaret Archer's (2000; 2003; 2012) reflexivity theory. This theory is founded upon the premise of natural and continuous discussions we have with ourselves internally when confronted with new situations as an internal conversation (Archer, 2003:30). Caetano's study (2014) offers a deeper evaluation of Archer's reflexivity framework.

Archer's reflexivity framework offers us some principles to work from in determining the formation of one's identity (Archer, 2003:94; Archer, 2007:2).

- People's personal identities are subject to change because of the manner in which identities are formed such as our unique and different ways of dealing with challenges, prioritising, reacting to what we hear and attending to problems, which shape our thoughts, behaviour and actions;
- Internal conversations are common occurrences for people; however, the process in which it takes place and when, why and how it takes place varies between individuals.

Archer explains that personal identities are created through the various internal conversations we have with ourselves (2003:11). As such, this internal conversation may be subject to one's own values and experiences, reflections of practices and external drivers (Archer, 2003:9), such as benchmarks for subject areas and custom practices at universities which continuously evolves through reflection. These internal conversations may manifest themselves in a variety of ways (Archer, 2007:96).

Archer explains that these may be where we may require approval and confirmation from others before making a decision, known as communicative reflexivity. We may have internal dialogues which lead directly to action without the need for validation by others, known as autonomous reflexivity. It is also possible that we may over-analyse and critique our internal conversations leading to self-doubt, stress and confusion, known as meta-reflexivity. However, there may be circumstances where we may lack the skills to deal with a given circumstance because of the way our inner dialogues take place, known as fractured reflexivity.

Within the higher education context, more often, academics are most experienced in classroom delivery, however they find themselves as beginners when starting to teach online. Through experience gained they will be able to redefine and reconceptualise who they are and what their role is on an online teaching environment.

These underlying principles were used to view the data gathered in this study and to address the transition and change in identity of the participants, which could help come to an understanding of the professional identities formed by my research participants. An interesting aspect of the data analysis is a presentation of how the participants viewed their academic role, the impact of their

existing roles as lecturers and where relevant their previous experiences, which helps to gain a deeper understanding of how these experiences helped shape their online teaching role.

### **Research focus**

This study investigates how academics define themselves and whether this definition changes when they make the transition to online teaching.

In order to undertake this investigation, four research foci have been developed:

- Investigating the factors which influence academic identities
- Understanding academics' perception of how their identity might change when making this transition
- Examining the challenges academics face in making the transition
- Identifying potential new identity and roles which academics might embrace in online teaching

### **Research methodology**

To address the research question, a case study methodology has been employed to understand the changes in the identity of academics making a transition from classroom to an online teaching environment. Case studies offer a systematic way of exploring in-depth thinking and development of identities through the eyes of the participants (Yin, 1984; Hamilton, 2011), and thereby provide new insights to the research subject (Beer, 1988:168). There is also opportunity for creating ideas, testing hypothesis and developing theory (Smith, 1988; Yin, 1980).

This case study began with a short literature review to identify a focus for the research problem (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994). In this case, we are looking at the internal conversations that the participants have had, the process, challenge and awareness gained from the journey of beginning to prepare for online teaching, undertaking online teaching and refining their teaching. After this, the study tracked the development of three academics on a twenty-month journey and interviewing them in three intervals to capture potential transition in their attitudes, challenges and identities. The case study has been conducted methodologically to maintain its integrity and avoid bias (Billingsley & Poole 1986; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989; Reige & Nair, 1996).

Primary data was obtained through interviews and observations of the online teaching platforms. The purpose of the study was explained and acknowledgement and consent were obtained from the participants.

The interviews were semi-structured to allow space and opportunity to address the how and why questions (Smith, 1988; Yin, 1989) and were recorded by way of written interview notes. Descriptions and direct quotes from the data gathered are utilised in the findings section. The analysis was enhanced by testing out the underlying principles in Archer's framework to triangulate (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). These processes helped establish a link between the research questions, the method of data collection, the interpretation of the data and findings of the study (Yin, 1994).

### *Participant profile*

Three participants agreed to become the subject of study in this research, all of whom were academics teaching on campus. This small sample size was chosen so that priority could be given to capturing the personal and human dimensions of the academics' experience over a period of time, with an attempt to transparently show the relationship between the participant and their journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001). The knowledge and findings in this study were created and constructed

through stories of the participants' experiences, facilitated by in-depth study of their journey through the values, beliefs and experiences that guide their story, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact on their transition. Participant 1. was a law lecturer with ten years of teaching experience, specialising in teaching exam-based modules prescribed by the subject professional body. His philosophy in teaching was to ensure that every student had the opportunity to develop skills, confidence and ability through opportunities to think innovatively in his lessons. Classes were mainly discursive, rather than in a traditional lecture format, employing methods of active learning via student participation and collaborative work using problem-based approaches to learning. He works in one of the newly formed teaching-focused institutions in England. In his university, 95% of their courses are taught on campus with relatively little utilization of technology for delivery of teaching or student support.

Participant 2. was a languages lecturer with one year teaching experience. She believes that the best way to teach languages is to coach and facilitate student learning. Her teaching methods are student focused aimed at developing confidence and interaction through group projects and reflective portfolios. She believes that students learn best when working with and learning from their peers. She works in a research focused institution where 95% of their courses are taught on campus. Technology is used minimally across the institution.

Participant 3. was a business management lecturer with twenty years of teaching experience and had just begun trialling out online marking. She explains that after testing various methods of teaching she is a believer in using the traditional lecture format and to spend additional time monitoring and intervening where necessary. She explains that through lecturing she is able to cover the dense quantity of subject knowledge needed and successfully create interest in a subject, clarify complex materials and provide structure to students learning. She teaches in a teaching focused institution which has 15% of its programme delivered online. There is a strong steer for the university to employ technology to complement classroom teaching and support students.

The three academics who participated in this study had about thirty years of teaching experience between them, however, none of them had taught online prior to the launch of the new online programme. All of them have had experience of using virtual learning environments to complement their classroom-based teaching for uploading lecture materials, repository for assignment submission and putting out announcements to the class. They were interviewed at the start of their online teaching, at the end of the first year of teaching and finally twenty months after the start of the online teaching.

The findings are presented chronologically using actual words used by the participants. These words help to show us a reconstruction of the participants' experiences of undergoing the transition from campus-based teaching to online teaching.

The narrative approach used in this study shrouds itself within Archer's reflexivity framework of internal conversations. According to Vandenberghe (2005) '*...To properly understand how personal identity is formed, one has to understand that the internal conversation takes the form of a narration...*' (2005:233).

### **The identity of an online academic: findings from a case study**

#### *First term of online teaching*

Initial reaction to teaching on an online programme included worry and anxiety due to reasons such as the:

lack of experience, not understanding what students expected, the need to redesign existing teaching materials

(Participant 1).

How to redesign materials fit for online teaching, replicating the traditional classroom seminar discussions to an online environment

(Participant 2).

The need to change their perception of what it means to teach, the concern of having to be available to students outside work hours

(Participant 3).

The tutors were anxious because of the newness of this approach of teaching to them and the challenges that lay ahead, however they were willing to take on a new initiative. This was great to see especially because past literature had found that academics do resist changing their teaching approaches especially if there is a lack of time, support and training (Garrison & Anderson, 2000; Thanaraj & Williams, 2014). In-house staff development training was useful to an extent but seeing sample online environments, how they were set up and used went a long way in encouraging and instilling confidence in the tutors.

The tutors were keen to keep up with new ways of teaching and saw the benefits of 'flexibility for students' (Participant 1.) and 'the possibility of recruiting students without restraint on a geographical location', (Participant 2.) and thereby facilitating access to education to those who may 'not be able to travel in to study, which is one of the ethos of our programme' (Participant 3.). Participant 1 also commented that the ease to study and the availability of study materials 'as and when students needed it allowed for a more tailored and personalised learning journey' were also reasons why they were keen to undertake teaching online. However, despite realising the benefits of online teaching, Participants 1. and 2. felt challenged in identifying how they would teach and the changes they needed to make to their teaching. All tutors felt that they had to change themselves to something beyond being a lecturer and to the way they support and guide students.

Between the time of agreeing to take on teaching on the online programme and the launch of teaching on the programme, the tutors had four months to prepare their teaching materials. All tutors spent this time discussing the best way of imparting knowledge to students in lieu of the traditional lecture. Participants 1. and 3. decided to prepare several audio-video lectures of 15 minute blocks to cover each topic. Participant 2. prepared narrated PowerPoint slides. All tutors also prepared detailed reading notes to complement the audio materials. All tutors said that they were much more concerned over the method of content delivery and how they will teach their students. Participant 1. explained that this was 'mainly due to not knowing what challenges lay ahead'. Participant 3. explained that with the vast amount of teaching experience she already had she thought that 'it would be no different to classroom teaching'.

Participant 2. felt that they were 'not properly teaching students' in the traditional sense of the word. She packed her reading notes full of detailed materials and reading which to an extent removed the need for students to undertake any independent research of the topic. She did this to compensate for the lack of teaching. Participant 1. created over 7 15-minute lecture clips for each topic in order to replicate the lectures that she usually delivers in the classroom. All participants felt that they were being challenged to dilute their position as the 'knowledge expert' (Participant 3) and needed to 'hold on to the identity and role of a lecturer' (Participant 1; Participant 3).

Despite knowing that a good teacher isn't someone who simply lectures, all participants seemed to revert to a very basic perception of who an academic is. At this stage all three participants had not considered other crucial aspects of the teaching such as interacting with student, creating an effective study environment, managing discussions and participation and supporting students. Participant 1 felt that it was their responsibility to 'provide all the knowledge to the students' and was particularly challenged as she was 'unable to see the student and question their understanding of the topic'. Participants 2. and 3. realised that they no longer were able to lecture and support students in the way they were used to, however they didn't know what exactly their role was. Participant 3 commented that at this point in time he only knew he had to prepare these study materials. Furthermore, together with the two other participants, Participant 3. used the online content site as 'a repository of documents such as reading materials and lecture notes and links to websites for further readings and e-books for accessibility and convenience of students'.

Also at this time, tutors were questioning their role as a seminar tutor but felt that replicating the nature of a classroom seminar wasn't as challenging. Both roles involved 'facilitation of student discussion'. All tutors prepared reading notes which contained questions for students to work through within the document itself and for this reason the online discussions had limited student interaction. As the weeks went on, tutors began to encourage and guide students in their learning through the forums. Tutors had removed questions from the reading materials and begun to post these on the forum. Tutors commented on each post made by students, complementing students on good answers and encouraging others to build up their level of understanding of the topic, providing one-to-one teaching and support. All tutors felt comfortable with this approach as it was similar to replicating what takes place in a small seminar session in the classroom.

Participants 1. and 2. felt comfortable replicating the role of a classroom lecturer on the online programme. Participant 3. however felt that 'some sort of change was needed'. The traditional role of a lecturer did not fit well with the type of teaching, learning and support that was taking place online, but was unaware of 'what role she should adopt'. She explains that 'replicating the classroom on an online platform may not always be a valuable exercise due to the need for a varied pedagogical design to draw out the true efficacy of online learning'. Participant 1 realised that 'understanding the functionality of the online platform and how it can be utilised was becoming increase important' just as tutors were beginning to realise that simply replicating their methods in the classroom was inefficient.

All participants felt that there was much more than just understanding the how and why of online teaching. All of them were challenged in recognising their identity and the role they had in the online programme. Many also felt that the 'passive or quiet nature of online teaching did not bring out [their] personality in the video materials and in [their] communication with students on the discussion forum', also as recognised by Wenger (1998) and Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons (2006).

*After three terms - end of the first year of online teaching:*

The tutors were interviewed at the end of the academic year after gaining about 36 weeks of experience of teaching online. At the start of the interviews it was evident that the tutors were more confident and comfortable with teaching on the programme.

Participant 3. explained that she had to make 'substantial changes' based on her experience to what she thought online thinking was and what it ought to be. She realised that methods of classroom teaching could only sometimes be replicated in online environments, instead 'different methods had to be employed'. Participant 2. realised that teaching online involves 'needing knowledge and skills beyond the content being taught such as monitoring discussions, encouraging students to

participate, weekly debriefing and maintaining group harmony'. Participant 3. realised that they needed to go beyond the notion of classroom lecturing and 'take on different roles within the online environment in order to balance the facilitation of knowledge and discussion effectively'.

Participant 1. explained that he had undertaken 'some reading from the Higher Education Academy's website on how good practices of online teaching' and having spent time 'reflecting on the sorts of materials [he] was designing and the sorts of questions being posted online' and the manner in which he was 'encouraging students to respond and form discussions amongst themselves'. These reflections helped him make changes as to a how he continued with the course design. He suggested that 'the online academic coaches' students rather than teaches students' and this requires a substantial amount of time 'mentoring students as they learn new information presented to them'. He finds it difficult to accept that the skills of teaching which he particularly enjoys and has had excellent feedback on aren't something that he can utilize here. Instead he needs to 'coach and guide his students' using discussions between students and between himself and students. He felt that the 'responsibility is greater than in the classroom' as he needs to 'create opportunities for students to engage with the materials, demonstrate understanding and application of the knowledge and finds ways to elevate that knowledge to analysis and critical debate'.

Participant 3. explained that the challenge for her has been in making the transition from an academic who is seen to be as a highly qualified and respected authority in her subject area whose role was to transmit their knowledge to students has been hampered by technological limitations. She felt that her role online was not that of 'expert knowledge, but facilitating self-directed learning and supporting social relations'. The identity challenge faced has been discussed by McAuley et al. (2010) acknowledging that such a feeling of liberation [from constraints of the classroom] may be difficult for teachers to sustain in the face of claims that the 'role of the tutor will not only change, but may disappear altogether' (Kop & Hill, 2008:9). It is not known from this study whether the participants felt liberated with online teaching either, as this was not explored during the discussions. Participant 2 explains that facilitating the learning is nevertheless challenging as it is at 'different paces for different student, each one learning at their own pace, using their own style and the worry of whether students have learnt sufficiently is difficult to test and establish'.

In order to create more time for engagement and discussion of content, Participant 3. explained that she began to create more concise learning materials. She edited her videos so that they were no more 8 clips each lasting around 6 minutes. She explains that in this way the content is delivered in a concisely of up to an hour and 'students are provided with more time and space, with the aim to increase quantity and quality of the online discussion'. She explains however that this is not her usual teaching practice and that 'initially it made [her] feel as if [she] was not doing [her] job – that is, to teach.

Participant 2. explained that especially in the last term of teaching she felt that her role 'was more of a learning space architect'. She realised that her replicated lecture materials and reading notes from the classroom based programme was ineffectively used by the students online. Therefore, she spent a week redesigning her module with simple and short video lectures, and spent more time developing the interaction and discussion part of the module. She rewrote her instructions and expectations more clearly as she realised there was little room to explain to students as online learning is predominantly written text both in terms of how course content is presented and in how communication occurs between students and the instructor. She felt that this was also 'a real change that initially didn't sit well [with her as she] is an advocate of students developing and gaining expertise in presentation and oral communication skills'.



In order to make quick changes to the learning platform, all tutors mentioned that they needed to become 'experts in using the platform, such as knowing which tool or function of the platform to utilise in order to address a particular learning outcome' (Participant 1.). Participant 3. explained that also providing support the students were necessary to 'make them feel comfortable studying online' and to assist with navigating the platform well. All of them felt that they needed to develop their IT skills and in particular an understanding of how the platform functions in order to properly run the module online.

It is clear from the findings that all tutors in this study adopted change to their usual practices to ensure that their online students gained the most efficient learning possible. We see examples of the method of teaching, the necessary adaptation and amendments to teaching materials, awareness and concerns over challenges and new ways of working, all of which resonates with Hager and Hodgkinson's study (2009) which explains that making a successful transition requires a 'practical, physical and emotional, as well as cognitive' change (2009:633). It appears that the tutors felt that their role and identity changed significantly at different stages of the online teaching experience. It is this developmental process, which Kerby (1991) explains as 'an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences...' (1991:78).

#### *After 20 months of online teaching*

All tutors faced a number of challenges making the transition from classroom to online teaching. Many of these are concerns can be addressed with the appropriate time, support and pedagogical understandings (Thanaraj & Williams, 2014; 2016).

The tutors were interviewed again after more than twenty months of teaching on their online programme. All of them mentioned a marked change in their attitude towards online teaching, but more so towards their role in the teaching process. Participant 1. described herself as a 'facilitator of learning', whilst Participant 2. described himself as 'an instructor and manager of discussions' and Participant 3. described herself as an 'interaction facilitator'. The choice of words to describe their new roles and identity is a vast step up from describing themselves as lectures and having the need to replicate their classroom activities online.

All tutors developed confidence of teaching online. All of them were more open to new ideas about teaching through technology. In terms of learning benefits, Participant 1. has realised that online teaching allows time and space for reflection, research and deeper reasoning for both tutors and students. This finding was similarly echoed by Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2001) and Vaughan & Garrison (2005). Participant 2. said his challenge lies in 'thinking of ways of engaging students to learn from each other, read, understand and discuss the materials provided and engage students in the discussions online'.

Participant 3. explained that she learnt that she 'needed to let go of her tried and tested classroom approaches to teaching and adopt new ways of delivery the content, developing understanding and critical thinking' in her students. She began to realise that the teaching space was much more than a repository and is 'indeed the space for learning'. She began to read about useful ways of using the space more effectively. Participant 2. explained that given the 'difference in how students learn online, the tutor will need to take on a different role'.

Participant 1. said that the 'transition from a well-established role of a lecturer in a classroom to an online facilitator initially made [her] feel as if [she] was being demoted and she began questioning whether [she] was a good teacher in the first place'. She reflected that as a lecturer she spent many hours speaking and teaching her on-campus students, but has come to realise that she can 'still be a good teacher by facilitating online knowledge and discourse'. She felt that 'it was important to

prioritise and make effective the online dialogue' so that the level of 'learning can be incremental' and academic skills such as 'reflecting, reasoning and communicating can be improved'. This finding is supported by Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) who suggested that written communication facilitates critical reasoning and skills development. It would be useful to investigate the nature of this effectiveness in a future study. Similarly, Participants 2. and 3. had adjusted their philosophy and practice and based on their experience, they saw 'a change in role from content provider to facilitator and mentor of the student learning journey'.

The need to be present online as tutors do in face-to-face classes was raised by the three participants. They felt that unlike campus-base teaching, they needed to work longer to address questions and to comment on answers and ensure that students were progressing well. Whilst being present, Participant 1. explained that there was a lot of work around managing the discussion forums because of the vast amounts of written texts. She felt that by 'organising the discussions into meaningful learning materials was a good use' of her time. She would summarise key findings at the end of each study week and post a debrief of the summary and explain to students how the learning outcome of the week could be further met.

Participant 3. explained that whilst she was present on the online environment she felt her role was of 'an interaction co-ordinator'. She reflects that in the initial few weeks of the programme she worked hard to develop a safe and supportive learning environment for the students. She wanted to 'create a small learning community where students could learn from each other'. This need for online presence was discussed in Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung's study (2010) and determined as a key factor in contributing to student satisfaction and good learning. As time went on, her role was the 'instigator of discussion and the encourager of peer to peer interaction'.

### **Discussion**

In this study, Margaret Archer's model of reflexivity (2000; 2003; 2005; 2012) was used to analyse how academics have come to identify themselves during online teaching. The interviews were held at three points during the participants' online teaching journey and together with observations of their online teaching environment during this journey, it was clear that the participants went through a significant change in embracing their new roles and identities as online tutors. The interviews with the three academics were conducted to explore their online teaching practices, how these have evolved through experience and how academics accommodate their concerns and priorities following Archer's (2000; 2003) model.

#### *Principle 1: We generate personal identities through focused internal conversations*

The participants in this study faced a number of concerns and challenges when embarking upon online teaching. They addressed each of these challenges as they gained more experience in their new teaching environment. As they reflected on each of these challenges and found ways of addressing these as effectively as possible, they also began to adopt new practices of teaching, supporting and interacting with students.

As Archer (2007) explained, this internalisation can bring about a change in the manner in which they undertook their academic responsibilities and academic freedom against various constraints such as changes to higher education landscape, institutional policies and benchmark statements for subject disciplines. These 'interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences' (Kerby, 1991:78) can lead to changes and development in one's professional responsibility, together with the necessary art of reflection (Schön, 1983).

Through the presentation of the narrative it is evident that each participant underwent a varying journey in their identity development. Although each undertook continuous internal deliberation,

these seem to be exercised differently, with different challenges and priorities and goals. The participants began with communicative reflexivity where they were seeking confirmation and reinforcement of their thoughts and ideas before implementing them, perhaps to an extent being uncertain of their own thoughts or actions due to a new experience. As they began to develop understanding of online teaching and had the experience of identifying what worked for them and their students, they became to autonomous reflexivity where their inner dialogues that lead directly to action without the need for validation by other individuals. During the transition to online teaching there were some elements of meta-reflexivity, but no evidence of fractured reflexivity.

As such, when mirroring this to Archer's model of reflexivity, the participants could be identified as communicative reflexives. They had little experience of online teaching and were all dependent on sharing aspects of their internal conversation with others before making changes to their practices. Infact this is a healthy, necessary and effective way of learning and developing our professional selves through engagement with our community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

*Principle 2: We have the power to decide whether we choose to accept our initial placement of identity*

The findings have shown that as the tutors began to experience their new roles and explored the expectations of what those roles might entail, they began to develop new expertise, knowledge and skills for online teaching. It also appears that the participants had come into academia with some sort of an image of who an academic is and what they do, which in turn help to create their sense of professional self. With this in mind, making the transition to a different method of teaching and supporting students can be either challenging or empowering to the initial image of an academic. This transition reciprocates with Archer's findings that people's personal identities are subject to change because of its formation process such as our ways of dealing with challenges, prioritising and accommodating problems within the social context to shape our behaviour and actions.

During the journey the participants underwent a transformation in teaching assumptions, beliefs and practices, and consequently embraced new ways of teaching and supporting students online. This requires taking on different roles and identities. Hager and Hodkinson (2009) explain that there are changes which are 'practical, physical and emotional, as well as cognitive' (2009:633). Although Archer's internal conversational framework considers the potential for changes in the modes of reflexivity offered, the research supplied does not facilitate validation of the transition from one form of reflexivity to another or acknowledge the possibility for an individual to be of high reflexivity in one situation but for the same individual to be guided by societal and structural challenges in another.

Despite initial resistance, most likely due to the lack of knowing what effective practices to adopt, by the end of the first year of teaching the programme, tutors had comfortably realised the need for different roles and identity. Some were more comfortable with certain roles than others, although all showed awareness and practice of facilitation of learning, instructing and managing discussions, mentoring and coaching students, technical expertise and online space designing. It is through these roles that an instructor guides student learning and improves the student learning journey with the aim of enhancing student learning outcomes.

As internal conversations are shared and tutors gain more experience and consequently more confidence with the different dimensions of online teaching, this might allow for looking ahead at a future practice or a future way of thinking (Conway, 2001). By moving away from a community of practice to relying on one's own understanding and experience, acting independently based on their own decisions is known as the autonomous reflexivity in Archer's framework. Individuals have power

to change, accept or even reinforce existing structures and power relations and how this power is exercised depends on the way individuals perceive their own identities.

From the study, it is possible to determine that academic identity is determined by a collection of factors including the individual, their epistemological stance, professional practice and the communities of practice to which professionals belong. My findings suggest that online tutors start out as communicative reflexives with all the characteristics of that group such as being reluctant to take risks, needing to talk through options with colleagues and peers and being keen to maintain good relations. With experience and confidence they move towards an autonomous reflexive agent. It is possible however depending on the nature of their prior professional backgrounds, norms within their discipline and the type of university they work in that they start out as autonomous reflexives by default.

This study utilises Archer's theory as the only theoretical framework to study identity. As such, the exploration of the depth of identity formation and development is limited. Further, within the reflexivity framework, Archer does not explore whether an individual can be of hybrid reflexivity, rather than in one form of reflexivity. There is also some useful exploration to be developed on familiarization, internalisation and changes to daily practices. Archer's theory pays little attention to social formation and socialisation, rather focuses on its consequences and effects of the modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2007a:97). Furthermore, the framework detaches itself from social presence in conversations with one another, despite strong theories which exist supporting the need for social relations such as Garfinkel (1999), Goffman (1990) and Schutz (1972). In order to strengthen future work on identity study, a theoretical triangulation would be employed. Alongside Archer's reflexivity, using Giddens' theory of self-construction to strengthen the internalising process and Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1977; 1990) can be combined to grasp more deeply personal identity.

### **Conclusion**

In the present paper, the focus has been on Margaret Archer's reflexivity theory to evaluate change in identity. It explored the journey of three academics as they moved from face-to-face teaching to online teaching over a period of twenty months. The findings suggest that making an effective transition not only requires technical knowledge and pedagogical understanding to ensure effective learning outcomes.

A crucial aspect of making that transition is in supporting academics to embrace the changes to their role and to their practice and consequently to their identity as knowledge creators. The findings suggest that making an effective transition for academics requires a variety of ingredients. Notwithstanding the need for technical knowledge and pedagogical understanding to ensure effective learning outcomes, a crucial aspect of making that transition is in supporting academics to embrace the changes to their role and to their practice and consequently to their identity. For a proposal on the type of support that could be of real value in effectively making the transition, Thanaraj and Williams (2016) discuss the benefits of a 'policy-led, large-scale, incremental adoption' using a change hierarchy model which recognises and values the contributions made by academics teaching online.

However, with only three participants it is not possible to generalise the findings and articulate that how the transition in identity comes about. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study may assist in discussions around staff development training and in supporting academics on the transition.

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