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ACADEMIC APPRENTICESHIP: DEVELOPING NOVICE ACADEMIC TEACHING AND RESEARCH SKILLS THROUGH A FOCUSED MENTORING PROGRAM

Abstract:

Novice academics often transition into the world of academia via PhD or doctoral studies. During their studies, PhD students are often charged with casual teaching responsibilities as part of their 'apprenticeship'. Duties often include assessing student work and providing feedback through tutorials and assessment tasks. Whilst undertaking teaching duties they are also attempting to develop their own research skills repertoire, often struggling with developing the requisite academic literacies required by such high level studies. Thus, these novice academics and researchers, face considerable challenges in their dual roles and support for these academics can be sporadic or even inexistent in terms of professional development. Research findings demonstrate that the marginalisation of casual novice teachers from professional conversations and professional development activities adversely affects universities in three ways: limiting the potential for quality teaching; impacting student satisfaction negatively; and, reducing staff retention of promising academics.

This paper reports on a case study of a professional learning initiative delivered through a mentoring framework that was established at an Australian university. The initiative is called the Learning through teaching program (LTTP). This paper will report on how the LTTP sought to provide an intervention that brought together PhD students as mentees, and experts from across the university as mentors. The focus was to enter into discourse on learning and teaching with the aim of fostering teaching and research competence. Further, the case study reports on how explicit unpacking of academic and intercultural writing literacies through a series of targeted discussions around the themes of assessment and feedback supported the mentees, as both novice teachers and 'apprentice' researchers, in gaining deeper level understandings of these complex, critical aspects that were core to their dual roles. The case study provides a consideration of another rather unexpected outcome, the positive impact of the mentoring framework itself and how this can be used as a professional development approach to foster understandings, skill development and engagement of, as was discovered, all participants.

Keywords:

academic literacies, intercultural literacies, casual teachers, academic dialogue, assessment, feedback, mentoring, professional development, PhD students, novice academics

JEL Classification: A00