

Changing Identities in Community of Practice: Expert Teachers to Novice Researchers

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Abstract: Teachers and researchers are said to belong to two distinct communities of education. At the university, academics are required to engage in research work which could be a relatively new experience for teachers who had solely focused on teaching after joining the universities. Hence the purpose of this qualitative research is to shed some light on the tensions that are created and experienced by novice researchers at the university whose previous careers were as teachers in schools. Two lecturers, Gina and René, were purposely selected to investigate the phenomenon of changing identities from expert teachers to novice researchers, and to observe how the experienced teachers became newcomers adapting to the new target practices of research as required by the university. Findings from interviews and observations revealed the tensions and negotiations that occurred as the teacher novices engaged in the target research practices from teacher trajectories, but prolonged engagement in the target practices revealed emergence of researcher identities. The findings of this study suggest that novices who are expected to adopt new practices need to be supported with instructions and learning opportunities for effective transitions.

Keywords: Changing identity, Expert teachers, Learning Organisation, Novice, Researcher

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to help unravel the phenomenon of changing identities when individuals who have high-level expertise in one domain, i.e. teaching, are thrust to learn the practices in another, i.e. researching, which renders them as novices in the new domain. The thrust between what has been learned and the target practices is complex as it requires negotiation of meaning within the two domains. In this study, the individuals are former teachers from schools with vast experience who have continued their teaching careers at the university. Due to a change in workplace policy, they had to engage in research activities. Hence how individuals like them participate in the target research practices is a contested site and warrants attention. Research in cognitive psychology affirms that the transition involves negotiation of existing mental frames (or 'teachers' mental lives' for Borg (2003, p.6) and behaviour. On this premise, it is rationalized that over prolonged engagement with the target practices, a change in identity ensues.

How teachers, especially expert teachers, who move on to research careers at the university negotiate teaching and researching practices has not been examined closely in teacher literature. Understandably the dearth is due to the indiscernible line between teaching and researching at the university. In this study, 'a teacher' is a teaching academic who focuses on teaching activities similar to teaching at schools and does not engage in empirical research and innovations. This is due to the university curriculum which requires the teaching of generic courses, e.g. English Language. However, policy change at times requires teaching staff to engage in research activities as part of its restructuring process. Hence academic staff who do not produce a desirable result or adopt practices that are outlined at the workplace may be misconstrued as nonperformers and could be penalized under the performance indicator yardstick.

Performance measurement for Malaysian higher education is emphasised in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020, and higher education institutions are required to provide measures that reflect their businesses as such tangible results have implications on resources and funding provided by the government. Hence most higher education institutions have in place a structured framework to measure performance for statutory reporting and internal management (Abdullah, 2012). Hence top-down management policies introduced at the workplace thrust individuals to engage in the new target practices. This inadvertently emerges as the point of entry into overlapping domains of the old and the new, which in this study are teaching and researching where new identities are minted.

2. Relationship between Workspace and Social Acts

In this study, the teaching staff began to participate in research activities when the university, recognized as a teaching university, started focusing on research, entrepreneurship and innovation besides the core activities of teaching and learning. The phenomenon of shifting policies is reflective of learning organizations (Dill, 1999) where universities continue to adapt to new practices possibly due to global factors and national agendas. Changes may include a realignment of structural forms and functions, also called as "structuring forms and forces" by Lave and Wenger (1990), and these include changes such as infrastructure, vision and role. Inevitably the shift between the old and new practices creates a contested site of changing climate for both the university as a learning organisation and its population where identities are altered. The present case focuses on the academic staff who engage in new practices within the changing climate.

The relationship between changes at the workplace due to top-down policies and the effects it has on individuals has been described in a few cases. One qualitative study in the 90s described how a university management's allocation of students' working space affected their written output. Chin's (1994) study is relevant as it revealed how a top-down administrative decision created tension at the ground level in an academic context. It involved thirteen Chinese postgraduate students at Bayview University, US, who had just enrolled at the university to pursue journalism. Although they were competent writers, they struggled to complete their written assignments due to the restrictive workspace and limited access to key resources in their field of study, for instance, the use of telephone for interviews. The close relationship between individuals and the physical space allocated to them by their university is succinctly described as "the bodily experience of occupying spaces and times that constitute the material world" in which individuals compose and construct meaning (Chin, 1994) in their context.

A decade later, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) also verified how top-down policies affected students at the university. The researchers revealed that part-time students perceived themselves as equal to full-time students and as members of their faculty. However, they perceived that the university did not treat them the same as they were given different tags and spaces farthest from the main offices. In fact, the part-time classes were held far from the main building, which was perceived as alienating them from the rest of the student population. A part-time student, Helen, was comfortable being at the periphery of the 'main' campus but her peer Emma shared '...we are without a doubt lepers that we are not matriculated'. O'Donnell and Tobbell's research reiterated the need to understand individual learning experiences and how they adapted to the changes emerging from the implementation of top-down policies. Unlike the two studies mentioned above that focused on students, the current one focused on teaching staff who were caught in the two domains of teaching and researching.

3. Appropriation of Teaching and Researching Discourses

Hypothetically, when individuals with vast teaching experience begin to embrace research discourse, there may be tension created in the interface of collision. Over prolonged engagement, novices could adopt new practices and experience changing identities. In the present case, the participants were former teachers who had accepted academic positions and had continued their craft of teaching. When it was mandatory to engage in research, they started to carry out research projects where the teacher stance was evident. The overlapping teacher-researcher domains is a contested site indeed as teachers and researchers have been described as belonging to two distinct communities of education (Bartels, 2003). Lave and Wenger (1991) affirmed that participation in activities creates situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. Therefore, teachers from schools who later become faculty members need to deal with the tensions arising in order to be accepted by the gatekeepers of their new target discourse communities. Additionally, in the 21st century, it is essential for teachers to be well-versed in integrating technology into teaching as well as in conducting research (Shafie, Majid, & Ismail, 2019). In short, they must deal with the textual (e.g. use of research genres) and social tensions (e.g. writing conference papers) in the course of their research learning processes.

Teachers and researchers are said to have separate discourses, mechanisms for communicating, purposes, target audience and literate practices (Bartels, 2003). However, teachers are often urged to “enter” into the academic discourse of Applied Linguistics in order to become professional practitioners of language teaching. Although the aim is obviously to encourage teachers to mine empirically driven knowledgebase on language, it is rare to find advice for researchers to do likewise, such as imploring their own teaching practices by mining teacher-oriented articles. The point here is not to argue who should adopt whose discourse but that it remains to be seen how teachers who, for instance, due to career change, engage and immerse in researcher discourse.

Teachers and researchers have different ways of reading research text and use of knowledge. Bartels (2003) studied language teachers’ and language researchers’ evaluations of each other’s research articles and reported that both groups use and have different uses for the genre. For instance, both groups differed on the construct of establishing validity. Teachers scrutinized how the article related to different classroom realities and reflected on their own teaching strategies. In contrast, the researchers focused on the presentation of objective and empirical evidence and contribution to their discourse community. In other words, teachers gathered knowledge to improve their *personal* knowledge base while researchers were interested in expanding the *public* research knowledge base. In a sense, teacher knowledge diverges as they experiment on their own while researcher knowledge converges into a unified body of disciplinary knowledge.

Additionally, teacher research centers on practical issues such as classroom events or “schooling topics” (Thomas, 2005) as compared to researchers who are concerned with theoretical problems (Swales, 2004). According to Thomas (2005), teachers’ conduct classroom research to increase their own understanding, solve classroom problems, further social progress, promote their own welfare and contribute to the body of knowledge. ‘Research’ for them means describing and explaining factual existing classroom conditions as means to increase their own understanding, not as how researchers understand it. Bartels’ (2003) participant Tina shared that although research was part of her school culture, they avoided the term “research” as it evoked “a negative feeling”. The other teacher participants detested the language of research articles as they found theories and research lexis difficult to understand and use. Bakkenes, Vermunt and Wubbels (2010) summed that ‘experimenting’ for teachers included trying out new teaching methods or lesson formats, making new materials or tests. Additionally, Thomas (2005) said that problem solving in teachers’ context is a means to provide guidance for decision-makers to cope with difficulties encountered in teaching or sharing their strategies with others. Teachers also further social progress as they correct social wrongs. Researchers, on the other hand, are concerned with theories and adding on to the body of knowledge in their fields.

Teachers did participate in research projects where they learned through interactions with other teachers (Bakkenes, Vermunt & Wubbels, 2010) but they mainly participated to promote their own welfare or well-being (Thomas, 2005). Therefore ‘contributing to the body of knowledge’ for them is an act of furnishing information about specific issues for interested people (Thomas, 2005), and not to add their own voice to the body of knowledge in their field or find their research space (Swales, 1990),

like researchers do. These motives for doing research reflect Bartels (2003) proposition that teachers and researchers belonged to different discourses.

Another stark difference in teacher and researcher discourse is the use of literature review genre as a mechanism for communicating findings. The genre was absent in teacher-oriented articles (Bartels, 2003), which could be explained by examining teacher practices. As teachers strive to expand their personal knowledge base of their teaching and students, their personal knowledge and intuition form the framework for their practice, not theories. Instead of referring to past work, they focused on common classroom situations where specific teaching strategies worked. This is also the case when Bartels' (2003) teacher-participants were involved in large research projects. Therefore, naturally literature review has a different use for teachers as a communicative mechanism. For Thomas (2005, p.25), literature refers to sources of published materials useful in the conduct of research; literature search has *practical* uses such as revealing topics, defining key terms and suggesting methods. In short, teachers are seldom discussed in literature as contributing to the existing body of knowledge in "teaching" or urged to participate in a *decade-long conversation* (Crookes, 1998, p.7). Teachers' use of resources like books, magazines and teacher seminars (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010) confirm the little use they have for empirical literature reviews.

In contrast, the motive to contribute to decade-long conversation drives researchers to mine the literature in their disciplines and to add on to the literature review genre by publishing academic articles and books or attending conferences. Therefore they need to learn how to employ the mechanisms for doing so. This is precisely the problem for teachers who may have to learn (or unlearn) to participate in researcher's discourse where publications in reviewed journals are coveted. In contrast teachers disseminate information at faculty meetings, school newsletters or articles, bulletins, thesis/dissertations, educational conferences, university seminars, public newspapers, professional journals, books or websites (Thomas, 2005) which are related to their practices. In short, it is not required of teachers to adopt researcher mechanisms. How do they deal with the interface of the teaching and researching domains when they leave their services at schools and join the university as teaching staff?

4. Methodology

In this qualitative study, the events were recorded and analyzed in their entirety as they unfolded within the boundary of the university, however, only selected data is discussed (Yin, 2003). To outliers, errors and to avoid bias, the data has gone through preliminary data cleaning (Aziz, Seman, Hashim, Roslin, & Ishar, 2019). The two participants, Gina and René were focal points as they had similar educational background and expertise as language teachers at the university. Their roles were appropriate as "theoretical samples" (Gläser & Strauss 1968, cited in Marshall, 1996) as their participation was mooted by the changing climate at the workplace of teaching to teaching-research. They were interviewed face to face where semi-structured questions were raised and observed while participating in their research projects. Findings were transcribed verbatim and categorised according to emerging themes.

As the participants' actions were observed at the university which prompted the change in their professional lives, it was necessary to obtain data on the university founding principles, mission and history as the backdrop to the participants' educational background, past careers and current positions. The rationale for analysing the 'past' was that it helped to understand the 'present' as Haneda (2006) affirms that life histories and envisioned futures are intertwined. Perkins and Salomon (1988, p.22, cited in James, 2006, 2009) reveal that the act of relaying prior knowledge from a historical context to the present one could be considered as 'transfer of learning' (or 'learning transfer for James [2009]). The participants of this study had vast teaching experience in schools that were extended to the new researcher role, values and practices, which at times created tensions within the current workplace.

5. The University as a Learning Organisation

This section discusses the university as a learning organization (Dill, 1999; Örtenblad, 2011) whereby the change of policies triggered the present climate change. The university's socio-historical

background or historical context (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007) revealed that the founding principles of the university necessitated the policy changes in order to remain relevant. The university was established as a training centre in the 1950s and was proclaimed a full-fledged university in 1999. It was established to train Malay and Bumiputera citizens as there was a need for local professionals to helm the administration of the newly independent Malaya. Hence it focused more on 'teaching' professional courses like Business, Accounting and Management to produce qualified personnel.

However, the initial focus to provide professional education and to elevate the socio-economic status had to be altered to address the current global challenges where research and publication are crucial for recognition as a world-class university. Dumanig, David and Symaco (2012) explain that universities are no longer defined by their social interconnectedness but rather on 'broad-based and multinational cohesion' whereby universities no longer focus only on localized traditional roles as knowledge providers for members of society. Instead, universities reinvent their roles by looking outwards to embrace globalization (Burnett & Huisman, 2010). This also means that universities that ignore or are unwilling to adopt such changes risk being pushed to the periphery of knowledge and power, and funding. In this study, document analysis showed that the present university retained its founding principles while striving for global recognition. Policies were drawn to promote a research culture among its teaching staff besides teaching and learning activities. Hence, it is important to examine how the individuals who have been enculturated in teaching activities adapt to the changing climate. The following section deals with two such individuals, Gina and René.

7 The Participants' Changing Identities

Findings on Gina and René revealed how individuals who had gained expertise in the domain of teaching were engaging in research activities due to the changing climate at the workplace. This section reports on selected critical events as samples of engagement in the target practices. In sum, the events demonstrated how the individuals' teacher selves acted out the newer researcher roles.

Analysis of participants' profiles revealed that Gina and René received their formal education in Bahasa Malaysia and English and were trained in primary education at teacher training institutions. Both have MA degrees. Gina is currently enrolled in a part-time doctoral programme at a different university and was at the final stage of completing her thesis in Applied Linguistics. She worked on her thesis during breaks at her office and met her supervisor once in every two to three months. Despite having to teach 18-22 hours at the university, she successfully juggled teaching and thesis writing, and had begun to engage in research activities. However, teaching was a priority which took up much of her time at work. She felt quite exasperated at times as she also travelled about 30-45 km from her home to the workplace which made it difficult for her to work after office hours at home. Unlike her, René had obtained a master's degree a decade ago and was contemplating whether to pursue a doctorate degree as she was retiring in six years. She wanted a promotion to "retire comfortably". With over twenty over years of teaching in schools and at the university, the participants were very experienced in teaching of English as a second language.

When Gina and René joined the university as academics, they were asked to teach diploma and undergraduate students. They were confirmed as permanent staff after three years of probation. Under the old policy, Gina was not required to undertake any research projects for confirmation of position but was motivated by the change in institutional climate. Document analysis of policies introduced in 2000 and 2008 showed that staff promotion application forms contained criteria on "research and publications" and "conference". Hence René would need to complete a research project for her confirmation. Apart from that, she may need to obtain a joint-research grant and collaborate with international bodies as part of the promotion exercise. Analysis of Document 6 in this study obtained from the site revealed that staff were recommended to have at least two collaborative research projects with international bodies. The expected outcome was at least one citation indexed journal article. Accordingly, staff performance would be assessed based on their roles (e.g. leaders or members) in the research projects and publication of research articles (e.g. published in local or international journals). The following section further discusses how teaching staff like Gina and René participated in the changing climate and experienced changes in their social identities.

5.1 Gina's Learning Experience

Gina began engaging in research activities by collaborating with her more experienced peers for presenting papers at conferences. However, she recalled her role as being limited to searching for literature, completing forms and typing (construed as *peripheral tasks*) while her more experienced peers wrote the contents of the research papers (construed as *central tasks*). After her initial experience, she began to play a more central role like leading research projects and segregating tasks to less experienced colleagues. This implied that over a prolonged period, she was gaining expertise as a researcher and was acknowledged by her peers as a researcher. While her "social" role as a researcher was changing positively, her experience in research writing was still limited as she continued to struggle. This suggests that learning and acquiring new target skills is complex as confirmed during Gina's preparation of an abstract draft for a conference. It was her first experience of being the main author of a research paper and presenter:

"Why", the purpose first. Objective of why you want to do, methods or something like that, and then ..what do you gain from it.. the implications. What did the study show as well.. the findings. What else.. who are involved.. the participants. (Event 2)

The excerpt shows Gina's attempt in making sense of the rhetorical structure of the abstract. Gina referred to it as the "Swales move method" for constructing abstracts and mentions words like "purpose", "objectives", "methods", "implications", "findings" and "participants" which reflected her awareness of the target research genre. She shared that she had learned them from another doctoral student at her university, and not from her more experienced peers, Sam and Lee, whom she collaborated with initially but was asked to do the peripheral tasks:

Sam and Lee expected me.. thought that I knew how to write (abstract) because they always go about writing the abstracts, especially Sam..but he never really taught me.. How many years with Sam and Lee, writing articles with them, I still didn't learn.. ((later she compares her situation with another pair of colleagues, Shah and Kay)) Shah said Kay taught her how to write, so that's where she picked up. Then I used to see Shah.. not bad, Shah also can write. Because Kay.. Kay was good at writing and all that. Then Shah said "Kay taught me you know, taught me how to write, you must write this, you must write that, like stating the purpose". I feel I didn't know all that. For me, they (Sam and Lee) didn't teach me you know, like all the presentations that we had. They will give me the idea, ok put this in, or they will write up or that kind of thing. (Event 2)

Further probing also confirmed that she did not learn how to write and send out an abstract in a formal context like a workshop. On the contrary, she tried to examine published proceedings to understand how abstracts were constructed. She continued to experiment with substituting several words that she deemed suitable. This critical event reflected the challenges individuals faced when individuals had to 'discover' for themselves the nature of the target skills. In fact, the tension is compounded by the unequal roles of other players who may or may not opportune learning situations for the novice in the contested space.

The phenomenon of the initial entry from one domain to another could be aptly explained through Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of "legitimate" entry where cases of novice tailors, navigators and butchers who were assigned to less critical tasks (construed as peripheral tasks in this study) but over prolonged time, were assigned to more important tasks (construed as central tasks). Unlike the novice tailors, navigators and butchers whose tasks were dictated by the masters, Gina's was her more experienced peers who "assigned" her to do simpler tasks. They dealt with more crucial tasks like writing the abstract and submitting it to the conference organizers. Hence, their knowledge and expertise had put them in an "empowering position" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.36) which indirectly compromised Gina's own learning opportunity. She was unsure of how and what to write in her later attempt. In this sense, Gina's transition from the prior experience as a teacher to researcher reflected her changing roles, that is from a peripheral member to an independent leader collaborating with other novices. Hence the

changing roles, acknowledged by her peers, confirmed her changing identity from a teacher to researcher. For Lave and Wenger (1991, p.36), such “changing locations and perspectives” are imminent as individuals continue in the new direction over a prolonged period of time.

5.2 René’s Learning Experience

René had never been involved in research activities when she was a teacher in school. Her research experience is limited to her postgraduate education where she had obtained a master’s degree a decade earlier. She constantly drew on her postgraduate experience when engaged in research activities in the present context. When queried about her research knowledge, she mentioned that she could “vaguely recall” her master’s research methodology class besides her own readings of online theses where she paid attention to “how the writers presented their work”. In other words, René relied on her personal learning curriculum, i.e. prior knowledge from her methodology class, when dealing with methodological issues in the present context. The act of relaying prior knowledge from a historical context to the present one is documented as ‘transfer of learning’ (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p.22, cited in James, 2006, 2009) or ‘learning transfer (James, 2009) whereby knowledge from one context is applied in another. If both contexts are similar, the transfer is easier and done unconsciously. Hence René’s postgraduate experience and prior knowledge helped her engage with the target researcher role in the present context.

As mentioned earlier, René had to participate in research activities due to the change in the university policy where newcomers had to complete a funded-research project for job confirmation. In the first year of her career as an academic staff, she had to head a research project and collaborate with two other newcomers. Her collaborators were “younger”, “less experienced in teaching” than her and were from different disciplines (Accounting and Business). Hence, they were not familiar with René’s research project on error analysis but agreed to work with her for job confirmation purposes.

As the research group leader, René “assigned” her peers to type out her handwritten drafts, source for related literature and fill out relevant forms. However, she completed the research project almost single-handedly as they were not “helpful” possibly due to lack of disciplinary knowledge. In other words, René, being the head of the research project, pushed her novice peers to carry out peripheral tasks. In this sense, René’s experience reflects Gina’s where her more experienced peers determined the tasks she had to do.

Nevertheless, both participants’ experience clearly shows that peer interaction and power position determined whether individuals participated at the periphery or centre of target practices within the contested space. Also, there was no master-apprentice didactic relation in the context or support made available for newcomers like René at the point of entry into research practice at that point. She was expected to carry out independent empirical research without collaborating with senior members to participate in the target core activities. This was due to the policy which only applied to new staff at that point of time. In this aspect, she had experienced what Lave and Wenger (1991, p.93) conceptualized as “benign community neglect” and had sought other newcomers to work with. This clarifies that within the contested space, a formal support system is needed to steer the novices towards the target practices.

Data was also collected from René when she participated in a scientific exhibition organized at the university. Besides presenting papers at conferences, her peers were increasingly participating in scientific exhibitions as this was recognized by the university as an important research activity. The university had set up a Centre of Excellence (COE) to oversee the competitions. It was a way to encourage academics to showcase their research products. If the exhibited products were recognized as commercially viable, the COE assisted the inventors with the patenting process and financial aid. The management also acknowledged the academics’ participation with certificates and encouraged winners to showcase their products at other national and international competitions. In this sense the university and the academics formed a symbiotic relationship for garnering success and recognition among the scientific community.

This fertile research climate further motivated René to participate in the scientific competition organized at the university. She collaborated with two other colleagues and three students from the Language Centre to develop a prototype. Initially, they wanted to create a language-based product like a board game or software but decided on a more “interesting” and “competitive” innovation. Therefore

she built a “river-cleaning” machine the size of a remote-controlled car which functioned like a tractor (see **Figure 1** below) with the help of her students. It was placed in a children’s pool. During the exhibition, she used a remote control to demonstrate how it could scoop litter as it cruised along a “dirty river”. She and her students also put up posters to explain its mechanisms.



Fig 1. René’s Presentation on the Mechanisms of the Prototype

When queried about her experience collaborating with her colleagues and the students, she shared that her co-researchers who did not have any prior experience like her and were not very cooperative. Eventually, she was forced to complete it without their input. However, she continued working with three of her students as she believed they would benefit from the activity as it was fun. She made the students as members in her group as she believed that they were more well-versed with the mechanics involved in the modified remote-controlled car (see **Figure 1** above). In her previous experience teaching in schools, she had worked with her students in completing school projects such as mural painting and in carrying out English Language Society activities. In relating her experience at school to the current context, she believed that working with her students enriched their learning experience and allowed them to practice their communication skills. She also believed that they were given opportunities to speak in formal English when explaining to the judges.

René's experience of participating in the two research projects, research writing and participation in a scientific exhibition, denotes the struggles she experienced when transitioning from teaching to researching practices. Her teacher experience from school and at the university prior to the new policy was stronger than the researcher experience as she transferred some of the teacher practices into the new researcher space, i.e. focusing on students and their learning experience in building the toy-like “prototype”. She shared that one of the judges informed her that the product was novel, but it was not ‘doable’ as it may incur millions and the technicalities involved were beyond her disciplinary knowledge. This episode reflects the negotiation of knowledge and informal learning that novices experience and contribute towards their changing identities.

6. Conclusion

Gina and René’s entry and points of transition from teaching to researching within the contested site of their workplace reflected changing identities. Their historical background particularly their education and past careers as teachers played a pivotal role in how they dealt with the current researcher practices during projects. Perkins and Salomon (1988, p.22, cited in James, 2006, 2009) explained that the act of relaying prior knowledge from a historical context to the present one could be considered as ‘transfer of learning’. Gina was able to transfer her PhD scholar experience while René recalled lessons

from her master's course. Both related their experience working with their peers. This suggests that the learning and transfer of skills and knowledge from individuals' near or far distance influenced how they engaged in activities in the current context. It could be inferred that when the transfer is near, the change in role and identity is expedited. When it is far, more learning needs to occur before the change in identity is mooted. Hence formal intervention could be offered at the workplace to help individuals make the transition. This could be done through organising workshops or prompting experts to engage with newcomers. Prolonged engagement in research activities could allow them to gain the target researcher skills, and identity. This transition is conceptualized as an evolving form of membership where individuals' 'growing involvement' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.37) in the target practices created a personal curriculum within themselves where 'sustained learning' (p.56) took place.

If Gina and René had not made a conscious decision in participating in the research activities, the personal curriculum would not have been activated and hence, they would have remained as neophytes in research practices. In this perspective the contested space between teaching and researching is challenging. They had to negotiate meaning at different levels, e.g. written and spoken discourses, and act accordingly to the demands of the events in which they participated in. The social sphere was the most challenging as their participation was regulated by the expert practices (e.g. disciplinary knowledge requirements). However, due to René's inexperience, there seemed to be a mismatch between what was expected by the expert community and how she dealt with innovation, her students and her collaborators. Nevertheless, René's participation at the periphery of expert practices suggests that she had had a change of identity from a teacher to neophyte researcher, and this status quo too may change over prolonged engagement.

Also, the socialization that occurred among the individuals played a significant role in the individual learning process at every stage of the events observed. Gina's initial experience in research revealed that she had been 'assigned' to do less critical tasks by her more experienced peers. René, who was a novice herself, headed a research project and assigned her members to complete tasks. Lave and Wenger (1991) provides insights that the circulation of knowledge spreads 'exceedingly rapidly and effectively' among peers and near peers (p. 93). This means that interactions with significant individuals could afford or prevent crucial learning opportunities for learners within the contested site.

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