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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9wb0w4q1>

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Publication Date

2021-01-07

DOI

10.15766/mep_2374-8265.11070

Peer reviewed

Educator Identity Formation: A Faculty Development Workshop

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Abstract

Introduction: Health professions faculty members often struggle deciding on career paths balancing their identities as clinicians, educators, and scholars. Identity formation research has identified three major influences: context, roles, and agency. Identity influences career decisions and, in turn, affects engagement in medical education and faculty development. We designed a single-session workshop to foster educator identity formation. **Methods:** The workshop varied from 1 to 3 hours. It explored how identity develops and considered how self, role, and context could be shaped to grow and sustain identity. Participants used a handout called Identity Quakes to indicate satisfaction with their support, engagement, and empowerment. The workshop employed direct instruction to provide language and tools to scaffold conversation and self-reflection leading to future plans aligning participants' professional identities and roles with resources to support further development. **Results:** From 2016 to 2020, we offered the workshop to faculty members from diverse professions, including medicine, nursing, dentistry, physical therapy, and others, on 11 occasions (locally, nationally, and internationally) with audiences of 15-200 participants. At offerings that collected evaluations, the workshop received high ratings of 4.61-4.90 (very good-excellent) on a 5-point scale. **Discussion:** This single-session workshop is a valuable opportunity to reflect on identity, which faculty members rarely get to do formally. The Identity Quakes handout prompts participants to challenge their assumptions about their professional identities and roles, employ their agency/choice, and consider future career choices.

Keywords

Faculty Development, Identity Formation, Workshop

Educational Objectives

By the end of this activity, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the role and importance of educators' professional identities.
2. Identify how these identities can be awakened, strengthened, and supported.
3. Develop personal plans to achieve alignment between competing elements.

Introduction

The professional identities of faculty members exert a powerful influence on their choices of professional roles as well as on their academic productivity, motivation, and satisfaction.^{1,2} Early in their academic careers, faculty members develop clearly delineated identities as practitioners and researchers but often

struggle to develop an educator identity.^{1,3} Strengthening faculty members' identities as teachers makes them more likely to engage in educational activities and participate in faculty development.⁴ To achieve excellence in teaching and learning, faculty members need to embrace their identities as teachers and be supported in doing so by their institutions and by faculty development.^{3,4} This workshop was developed based on the research summarized in our 2019 *Academic Medicine* article "Strengthening Teachers' Professional Identities Through Faculty Development" and was highlighted in that article as an example of a single-session workshop focused on identity formation for educators.⁴

We began designing the workshop by examining the faculty development literature to determine if it reported any programs exploring and strengthening faculty members' professional identities.⁴⁻⁶ We found that most faculty development programs focus primarily on skill development designed to improve teaching and rarely address professional identity formation.^{5,7,8} Although faculty development programs often fail to directly address professional identity, they can play an important role in fostering teacher identity⁶ and other educator roles, such as

Citation:

O'Sullivan PS, Irby DM. Educator identity formation: a faculty development workshop. *MedEdPORTAL*. 2021;17:11070. https://doi.org/10.15766/mep_2374-8265.11070

mentor, curriculum developer, assessor of learning, educational leader, and educational scholar.^{9,10}

We also reviewed the literature on professional identity formation of teachers in higher education and medical education. Identity is viewed as a dynamic construct that is continually formed and reformed.^{11,12} Identity describes how individuals understand themselves, interpret their experiences, present themselves to others, and are recognized within their communities.¹³ Identity is derived, in part, from perceived membership and roles in organizations and interacts with personal agency and choice.¹⁴⁻¹⁷ Everyone has multiple identities, which vary in prominence at different points in their careers and life.^{12,18,19}

The literature on teachers' identities in medical education is sparse but growing.⁴ Beginning medical teachers often see themselves primarily as doctors or researchers rather than teachers, and the integration of a teacher identity can be challenging.^{2,20} Steinert and Macdonald²⁰ found that busy physicians perceived teaching as an integral part of their identity, which allowed them to repay former teachers for their own training, gave them an opportunity to contribute to the development of the next generation of physicians, and afforded them ongoing learning. These clinicians also perceived teaching as personally energizing and gratifying. O'Sullivan and Irby^{21,22} described similar motivations among clinicians and scientists who became occasional faculty developers.

Stone et al.²³ found that medical faculty who identified as teachers were more likely to want to teach. O'Sullivan and Irby^{21,22} reported that health professional teachers tended to describe multiple identities that could be characterized on a continuum ranging from compartmentalized to merged. Browne, Webb, and Bullock² explored what helped and hindered a clinician's transition into becoming a medical teacher, highlighting the role of a strong self-identity, clinical context, organizational support, and strategies for coping with change. These authors also observed that identity could influence choices about professional development. In summary, research on identity formation provides evidence for three major influences on professionals' identities: context (I feel supported), roles (I feel engaged), and agency (I feel empowered).

Authors have contended that longitudinal faculty development is likely to facilitate identity formation.⁴ However, many faculty may be challenged in their educator identities but unable or unwilling to participate in a longitudinal program. We identified that a gap existed because single-session workshops focused on

educator identity were lacking to meet the needs of these faculty members as well as those who might need a renewal of their educator identity. We chose to design a single-session workshop addressing educator identity formation for all faculty members who teach health professionals. In designing the workshop, we employed a social constructivist perspective allowing for development of a socially constructed reality.²⁴ Specifically, we intended to provoke thinking about satisfaction with current context, roles, and organizational support, and to then offer opportunity for discussion and socially constructed insights. This thinking would provide a basis for planning for identity and professional development.

Methods

Curricular Context

We created a single-session workshop focused specifically on identity formation for faculty members teaching in health professions education. We followed a process that paralleled Kern's six steps of curriculum development.²⁵ Our goals were to raise awareness of one's identity as an educator and consider how to manage that identity. The objectives were to address the personal sense of identity, review identity formation literature, and provide time to explore tensions between role, context, and agency that individuals experience. A key activity centered on individuals rating their satisfaction with items listed on the Identity Quakes handout. This handout had 14 statements related to potential roles (e.g., clinical teacher, assessor, mentor, committee member, etc.), 12 statements about personal agency/choice (e.g., I feel empowered to make changes in education, patient care, etc., and I am engaged with other educators, clinicians, etc.), and 12 contextual supports (e.g., the academic and/or health system supports my educational work, clinical work, research, etc., and also supports me through recognition, awards, etc.). We did not design a comprehensive list but rather one to stimulate exploration of factors shaping educator identity. The Identity Quakes handout prompted participants to challenge their assumptions about their professional identities and roles, employ their agency/choice, and think about future career options. Using direct instruction, the workshop format provided language and tools to scaffold conversation and self-reflection stimulated by the checklist that could lead to future plans aligning participants' professional identities and roles with resources to support further development.

Participants had no prerequisite reading. Facilitators conveyed all information through a PowerPoint presentation and handouts. However, other faculty developers using these workshop materials should prepare by reading the literature on identity

formation referenced in the slides and adapt them to reflect examples from their identities.

Implementation

We designed the workshop to meet the needs of faculty members with varying levels of focus on educator identity. The workshop could be offered in shorter or longer versions. If faculty developers wanted to challenge individuals to think about their identities, the 1-hour model was appropriate. If developers wanted to deeply explore educator identity, then the 2-hour model offered opportunity for self-reflection and small-group discussion. The 3-hour model worked well with groups where individuals knew each other and time was devoted to developing an individual plan.

The workshop materials included a PowerPoint slide deck (Appendix A) that provided the structure for the workshop and an introduction to the concepts of identity formation. Developers could adjust the deck after slide 5 to allow the opportunity to describe their own identities, highlighting personal and professional roles and organizational affiliations. Additionally, the workshop materials included a handout we called Identity Quakes (Appendix B). This handout was used to identify areas that might generate an identity quake. The handout was piloted prior to its first use and has remained stable since. The goal of the handout was to generate reflection and conversation. On the front of the handout, participants rated the 14 quakes. Turning the handout over, participants reflected on how they saw themselves and made a plan for what they would like to change. Other resources required were a piece of paper and a writing implement. A facilitator guide (Appendix C) provided detailed instructions for implementation and included a table describing the workshop's structure, components, resources, and time frames ranging from 1 hour to 3 hours.

We were the facilitators for the workshop offerings reported here and are experienced medical education researchers and faculty developers. We incorporated other developers in subsequent offerings. A skilled facilitator is required for the 2- or 3-hour workshops to stimulate and encourage discussions that can navigate university politics, individual job alignment, and race and gender issues.

Evaluation Strategy

A number of these offerings were not evaluated due to the sponsoring institutions' practices. At our own institution, the workshop was evaluated with the speaker form administered through the Continuing Medical Education Office (Appendix D). This form solicited participant ratings and comments.

Results

Learner Characteristics

Our first delivery of the workshop was in 2016 to 57 faculty members taking part in a half-day retreat for current and former participants in a yearlong University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Teaching Scholars Program.²⁶ We felt they could provide the critiques needed to improve the success of the workshop's approach. Since this was a retreat, we provided generous time for the participants to interact and found that they used that time, as have other groups since. Once we had introduced the workshop, we were able to present it an additional 10 times in a diversity of venues (nationally and internationally) and with varying time frames. Five offerings were at conferences where participants chose the specific session (four: 2-hour version) or attended as a plenary presentation (one: 1-hour version). The other five were offerings at single institutions as part of visiting professor programs and ranged from 1 hour, when asked to give a keynote, to 2-3 hours in a workshop format. The number of participants ranged from 15 to 200 in these various offerings.

Program Evaluation

Participant assessment of the quality of the workshop was solicited in several of the venues. We provide examples from three offerings, and the Table displays the postworkshop evaluation data from the 2019 UCSF Developing Medical Educators of the 21st Century workshop attended by 25 participants. Sample comments from participants of the UCSF workshop indicate awareness raising:

- “Extremely insightful and relevant. Thoroughly enjoyed it.”
- “Very intriguing way to explore multiple roles in medicine, super interesting.”
- “I gained so much out of this session. It made me realize that sometimes I need to concentrate on me and what makes me thrive in order to be the best educator I can be.”

Table. Evaluation Data From 2019 UCSF Developing Medical Educators of the 21st Century Workshop: Developing Your Identity as an Educator (2-Hour Format)

Item	Mean Rating ^a
Delivery	4.8
Content	4.8
Syllabus	4.8
Practical value	4.7

^aRated on a 5-point scale (1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent).

One participant commented about how the workshop helped generate the development of personal plans:

- “Fantastic discussion and reflection, especially as I am about to take on new roles. Loved how the worksheet really helped facilitate a deep discussion with my partner and I about our identities, which we carried on through lunch the next day!”

The 2019 workshop offered in Toronto, Ontario, was also rated by 11 participants as 4.9 on a 5-point scale (1 = *unsatisfactory*, 5 = *outstanding*). Comments from the workshop aligned with workshop objectives. Some indicated awareness raising:

- “Fascinating conversation that helps me to better articulate my role identity.”
- “Excellent session that led to good reflection of my own identities. Thought-provoking.”
- “The discussion stimulated thoughts that continue to percolate. Sharing in groups helped me to learn more about others.”

An exemplary quote illustrated negotiating tensions between roles, context, and agency:

- “Sharing in groups helped to learn more about other scholars’ challenges and to co-develop possible solutions. An empowering and important session. Thank you!”

The 20 participants in the 2020 UCSF Developing Medical Educators of the 21st Century workshop rated it 4.6 on a 5-point scale (1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*). One of the comments captured the objective of developing an individual plan:

- “I left this workshop with concrete strategies to support my goals as a medical educator.”

Discussion

To address development of professional identity as an educator, we developed a workshop to raise awareness of identity, tensions influencing that identity, and opportunity for personal reflection. Participants found this single-session workshop valuable. The topic was responsive to calls for including identity formation in faculty development programs. The workshop offered an example of how to engage and empower faculty members to pursue their career goals in a single session. In addition, the topic resonated with educators across health professions. Participants particularly liked the empowerment dimension of the workshop, which helped them realize that they had more agency than they thought. This encouraged

them to plan proactively to pursue institutional support for career development. The content of Identity Quakes and the process are innovative. The content addressed identity directly and offered an opportunity for individual self-reflection and sharing in the context of a supportive community. The initial section provided the conceptual framework and a synthesis of research on professional identity formation applied to medical education. This offered language to scaffold the conversations about identity that followed. The Identity Quakes handout prompted participants to challenge their assumptions about their professional identities and roles, employ their agency, and plan for future career choices.

Since educator identity shapes both engagement in teaching and faculty development, focusing on identity formation is a requirement for improving the field. By focusing on agency and career choice, teacher sense of purpose and well-being can be positively affected.²⁷⁻²⁹

Reflections and Lessons Learned

We imagine that faculty developers will enjoy delivering the 1-hour version to raise awareness of the topic. However, we believe that one receives deeper engagement with the 2-hour version, although it requires a skilled facilitator who can draw out the concerns of participants. For longer workshops, we suggest that facilitators personalize the presentation by inserting slides (after slide 5) to illustrate their identities, such as teacher, mentor, community member, partner, parent, and so on. We recommend the 2-hour version for workshops where participants might not know each other and the 3-hour version for participants who are familiar with each other. In these versions, participants must take time to complete the back of the Identity Quake handout since that is where they explore what they want their identity to be and how to make changes to get there. The resource can be improved by including updated literature, since the number of articles in this area is increasing, as well as examples developers may generate through their own offerings.

Limitations

While the resources for this workshop can be readily adapted to different audiences, the faculty developers who plan to employ the workshop will need strong facilitation skills and a knowledge of the literature on identity formation. The latter can be obtained by reading the articles referenced in the slides. We also have no longitudinal follow-up of participants except for anecdotal comments we have received as to the powerful influence of the workshop.

Future Directions

We have offered this workshop to many faculty members in several different countries, so we are confident that it translates well across geographical, cultural, and professional boundaries. As faculty development moves online, we believe the workshop can be done online and can take advantage of small-group discussions in breakout rooms.

Appendices

- A. PowerPoint Presentation.ppt
- B. Identity Quakes Handout.docx
- C. Facilitator Guide.docx
- D. Workshop Evaluation Form.docx

All appendices are peer reviewed as integral parts of the Original Publication.

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Disclosures

None to report.

Funding/Support

None to report.

Ethical Approval

Reported as not applicable.

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Received: June 17, 2020

Accepted: September 26, 2020

Published: January 7, 2021