

The Challenges of Identity Transition of New University

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Abstract

After securing employment, new university professors are quickly thrown into a whirlwind of tasks for which they are not always adequately prepared. They must obtain research funding and publish the results of said research, prepare courses, and participate in various committees that either ensure the proper functioning of study programs or relate to the supervision of students. When starting their new job, they are often not aware of institutional support systems that are accessible to them and do not always approach their colleagues for assistance. In addition to these professional integration challenges, there is the process of identity realignment faced by new university professors. As former doctoral students or professionals holding a doctorate and working in a particular field, they progressively abandon their previous identities, which involves negotiating tensions inherent to the development of their new university professor identity. During this regulating process, attitudes, behaviors, and values, old or new, clash and cause tensions. It is through interactions between the new professor and other actors in the environment (i.e., colleagues and students) that the identity transition unfolds. While conducting semi-directed interviews, we collected testimonies from 24 new university professors, 14 women and 10 men, working in 4 different universities from the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The data collected allowed for the identification of tensions associated with identity transition and strategies adopted to facilitate this process. Therefore, this communication will present continuities and disruptions punctuating the identity transition of new university professors who participated in our study. The discussion will also propose strategies to negotiate tensions resulting from situations occurring on a daily basis.

Keywords: Academic staff; Canadian universities; Identity transition; Professional development; Tension negotiation