

**Title:**                   **Compassion, identity and training for PhD students who teach**

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### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Explain the key aspects of a compassion and identity-focused approach to developing the teaching abilities of PhD students
- Consider the usefulness of collaborations with counselling staff and PhD students to respond to the needs of PhD students who teach in their own institutions
- Discuss the benefits of and potential issues with a compassion and identity-focused approach to developing the teaching abilities of PhD students
- Examine whether a compassion and identity-focused approach would be beneficial to PhD students at their own institution
- Propose ways of enabling a collaborative and compassionate approach to developing the teaching abilities of PhD students in their own institution

### **Session Outline**

Waddington (2016) argues for compassion in Higher Education (HE) to counter toxic environments, especially in academic practice development. The toxicity of HE is particularly evident in the case of PhD students who teach: in the precarity of their employment status (Zheng, 2018) and related feelings of being overworked and underprepared; in the requirements to present an authoritative teaching identity against a backdrop of their imposter syndrome (Knights & Clarke, 2013), liminal status between staff and student, and lack of autonomy; and in concerns about their own future careers (Adsit, 2015).

This paper explores a new course, 'Establishing a Teaching Persona', which enables doctoral candidates who teach to develop compassion, for both themselves and their students, throughout their process of becoming a HE educator (Callary et al, 2012). The course aims to achieve this through an explicit focus on compassion, involving collaboration with a counselling professional, and discussions of compassion and emotion

(Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018) in relation to teaching and academic identities, involving collaboration with other PhD students.

The paper thus explores how compassion as a professional attribute (Maxwell, 2017) can be adapted specifically for PhD students who teach, building on research into professional compassion in both HE and healthcare settings (Billas, 2017; Crigger & Godfrey, 2014; Taylor, 2011). In analysing links between compassion and professional identity negotiation, it offers an insight into the benefits of a compassion-focused approach for developing the teaching practice of doctoral candidates, which has wider implications for academic practice in HE. A consideration of a teaching approach centred around identity construction which is examined through the lens of compassion reveals the utility of a compassion-focused approach, and also enables a deeper understanding of the issues encountered by PhD students who teach and how these educators may be empowered to oppose the harmful discourses of HE.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

00:00-00:05 Background and context: conversations with PhD students and staff at City, University of London, and the specific needs of PhD students who teach

00:05-00:10 Overview of compassion and identity issues in education

00:10-00:20 Discussion – how can compassion and identity issues be foregrounded in educational development for PhD students who teach?

- a) Do you recognise the need for compassion and identity focused educational development for the PhD students in your institution?
- b) Do you already address identity in your educational development courses? If so, how?
- c) Do you already address compassion in your educational development courses? If so, how?
- d) What ideas/ suggestions do you have to foreground compassion and identity issues in educational development for PhD students in your own institutions?

00:20-00:25 Overview of new course developed at City, 'Establishing a Teaching Persona' (ETP), and how this enables a compassionate and identity-focused approach through collaboration with a university counsellor and PhD students

00:25-00:30 Comparison of ETP with suggestions made during previous discussion; would it work in your context? Why/ why not? If not, what adaptations would you want to make?

00:30-00:35 Student feedback from ETP: evaluation and lessons learnt so far

00:35-00:45 Time for questions, drawing ideas together from discussions during the session, other suggestions for a compassionate and identity-focused approach, sharing of existing practice in this area

## References

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