

Blok 2A

Tema: Positioning theory and higher education research

Programtekst

This symposium presents positioning theory as analytical framework and offers four papers by Danish scholars who use positioning theory in their research on very diverse issues in higher education. The aim is to showcase the possibilities the perspective affords for analysis and to discuss the implications for practice.

Abstract

The aim of this symposium is to connect scholars who use positioning theory in their research on very diverse issues in higher education and to open up the analytic to others who may be interested in taking it up.

Positioning theory is a social constructionist approach and it emerged in the 1980s in gender studies and social psychology. It is concerned with theorising and analysing how people position themselves and others, and the personal, relational, cultural, moral, political, and institutional effects hereof. Positioning theory is most commonly used in studies of the discursive constitution of selves and identities and hence social realities. It has also been developed into a therapeutic approach. Although originating in the field of social psychology it has had widespread application over the last decade or so. It has especially been taken up in the field of education but has also included research in areas as varied as anthropology, journalism, midwifery, organizational change studies, workplace agency, political identity studies, and recently, public relations and strategic communication. Recently it has begun to be taken up more frequently in higher education research.

The symposium will be structured so that both newcomers and more experienced users will be able to engage. It will commence with a brief overview of the theoretical assumptions of positioning theory and of how it has been taken up in higher education studies, and a handout with a list of key references and sources will be made available. After this introduction, four paper presentations will follow (see abstracts below), and the session will conclude with a whole-group discussion of the potentials and pitfalls of the approach.

The 90 minute program will run as follows:

Introduction to Positioning Theory (12 minutes)

Paper 1 (12 minutes)

Paper 2 (12 minutes)

Paper 3 (12 minutes)

Paper 4 (12 minutes)

Discussion (30 minutes)

Simulated and professional frames for learning: students' and supervisors' positioning

Abstract

In this paper, I present a study of students' development of professional identity in two different frames for learning: a simulated frame (standardized in-school skills training) and a professional frame (workplace-based out-of-school learning). Changes in the higher education systems have increased the demand for standardised, outcome-based education [1] including more standardized training, but what might these changes mean to the students' positions, rights, and duties, and their development of professional identity? Inspired by Positioning Theory [2] the study revealed noteworthy differences in the ways in which students and supervisors positioned themselves and were positioned depending on the frames for learning.

Oplægsholdere

Mette Krogh Christiansen

Positioning Morality in Academia

Abstract

University teaching is a moral enterprise where the teacher regulates professional norms, embodies values and solves ethical conflicts. University students should cultivate moral sensibilities when studying a given subject. Moral positioning is explicitly or implicitly part of a broad range of subjects, if not all subjects, and positioning has ramifications for teaching. While the presentation is mostly theoretical, I will draw examples from medical education. When medical students engage in becoming doctors they not only acquire concepts about biomedicine but their studying and interacting with medical participants lead them on a trajectory to becoming persons who feel and enact moral emotions as part of being a doctor.

Oplægsholdere

Peter Musaeus

The teaching-research status gap: an analysis of a university teachers' positionings

Abstract

The departure point of this paper is the prevalent and enduring status gap between teaching and research in higher education in favour of the latter. Several initiatives have been taken on Danish soil to address and

change this uneven balance, but real effect seems a long way off. Believing that the key to understanding the 'stubbornness' of academic culture to not recognise teaching on equal terms with research lies within the daily negotiations of 'real' 'academichood' (Petersen, 2007), this paper presents a positioning analysis (Harré and Davies, 1999) of the case of a university teacher. The empirical basis is a poststructuralist qualitative interview with the teacher. At first glance the teacher tells a story of great success in Academia through excelling in teaching. But the positioning analysis shows how the teacher struggles to be recognised against a dominant research discourse in Academia. In the process he negotiates his own legitimacy and positions his colleagues as incompetent in teaching whereas he knows the 'truth'. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of such embodied storylines in terms of the problem of addressing the status gap between teaching and research.

Oplægsholdere

Kasper Sørensen

Becoming an academic developer: a preliminary auto-ethnographic exploration

Abstract

In the international literature, academic development has become a field of study in itself. Academic developers across the world reflect on its history, its identity and its practices (e.g. Clegg, 2009; Di Napoli, et al., 2010; Lee and McWilliam, 2008; Manathunga, 2011). As a contribution to that, and through the conceptual frame of positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and van Langenhove, 1999), this paper offers a preliminary auto-ethnographic exploration of becoming an academic developer at a Danish university. By examining extracts from a diary written over the course of the first 12 months in a job as an academic developer, the paper traces the shifts in subject positions and the implications of these shifts for the self and practice of academic development. The exploration focuses on the local expectations about the subject position that are operative and dominant and the conditions for 'becoming' in relation to these. The paper argues that paying attention to the multiple and contradictory positions available to academic developers, and the embodied experiences of ambivalence and contradiction, opens up for better understanding of both the constraints on and the possibilities for agency.

Oplægsholdere

Eva Bendix Petersen