**A tribe hidden in plain sight: The ambiguous role of the instructor in a Caribbean university**

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The unbundling of the higher education sector has led to an increase in the number of academic tribes. One such tribe is that of the ‘instructor’. This paper examines how instructors at a university in Trinidad and Tobago are conceptualised at the institutional and individual level. Three data sources were examined: a document review of role descriptions as found in job adverts; quantitative self-perception data, and qualitative data on perceptions of job roles. Analysis of the data shows that instructors undertake many of the same roles as lecturers but that this is not recognised in institutional documentation. This local analysis finds that instructors form an academic tribe whose activities appear to be hidden in plain sight. Such a position is likely to have managerial and/or policy implications leading to a re-examination of ‘teaching-only’ positions which may, in turn, result in a move back towards a re-bundled academic identity.

Keywords: Identity; roles; academic boundaries; teacher; unbundling

**Introduction**

The traditional role of the academic falls into the three general categories: teaching, research and service. In recent years however, this established tripartite condition has been unbundled and academic roles have been divided amongst lecturers, consultants, researchers, specialists and support staff (Macfarlane, 2011; Kinser, 2002). This unbundling has been driven, in part, by the focus of supply and demand on the higher education marketplace (Pathak & Pathak, 2010) and the blurring lines between higher education as an endeavour and higher education as an industry. The unbundling of academic roles has been further compounded in the age of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000), where individuals are tasked with managing ‘multiple relationships in a context where role boundaries have either collapsed or become blurred’ (Henkel, 2005, p.173). This unbundling has led to hybrid roles where members of staff find themselves working in liminal spaces at the margins of their organisation (Birds, 2015). Thus, while a university is made up of various academic tribes (Becher & Trowler, 2001) the boundaries between these tribes tend to be fuzzy. In such a situation the determination of one’s identity becomes an act of negotiation making the construction and management of job roles complicated and susceptible to individual perspectives.

Becher and Trowler (2001) suggest that academic identity is a result of disciplinary enculturation and that different academic disciplines have different traditions and different characteristics – from this perspective they describe academic disciplines as ‘territories’ that are populated by academics (tribes) working within the norms of their discipline. However, the tribal landscape is not limited to academic disciplines and Enders and Musselin (2008, p.133) found that higher education institutions are themselves becoming distinct territories – ‘differentiating themselves from one another, exhibiting their singularity and establishing stronger institutional identities’. Others have found tribal divisions in the teaching/research nexus (Tight, 2008) and in occupational specialisations such as ‘academic’, ‘manager’ or ‘support staff’ (Taylor, 1997). Here we use Becher and Trowler’s (2001) concept of a ‘tribe’ as a group that is bound together by shared practices and conventions but we remove these individuals from set academic/disciplinary territories and consider the wider teaching community. Further we consider how tribal identity is impacted by tradition, power and authority (Tight, 2008).

The constructed identities of some university tribes seem to be more easily detected while other tribal identities are less easy to pinpoint. The activities of the tribe that is generally known as ‘lecturer’ are broadly known (Kreber, 2000) and have been explored widely in areas such as academic orientation, job conceptualisation, academic discipline, professional goals and personal beliefs (Hannah, Stewart & Thomas, 2011; Voss, Gruber & Szmigin, 2007; Kuboni, 2009; Fanghanel, 2007). In contrast, in the Medical Faculty, some tribes seem to have been overlooked, as medical education has for a long time identified lost tribes of educators whose teaching identity has been subsumed into their professional duties (Dillner, 1993; Browne, 2014). Szekeres (2004) reports on another overlooked tribe and suggests that discussion on administrative staff appears to be missing in academic texts, creating an ‘invisible group’ of higher education professionals where ‘the construction of administrative staff demonstrate false impressions of what administrators actually do’ (p.20). Thus we find that different tribes have different levels of visibility. Where visibility is high there is likely to be congruence between how a tribe is conceptualised and how it performs its duties, but where visibility is low there is the possibility of oversight in the management and performance of a particular tribe.

While some have argued that the metaphor of ‘tribe’ is no longer relevant (Manathunga & Brew, 2012) because it speaks to a colonial classification of indigenous people, the term is less problematic in the context where this research was undertaken. Trinidad and Tobago is the oldest site of human habitation in the Caribbean with a history of a ‘multitude of tribes’ (Forte, 2004, p.5) and the ethnic composition ‘still holds traces of [these] original people’ (Carlin, 2007, p.1). It is a postcolonial multicultural society with many ethnicities vying for recognition and a fluidity of terms (Martin, 1998), such that words like ‘tribe’ do not shock and university students feel comfortable selecting aspects of various tribal identities to develop characters for the nation’s annual Carnival (Crawford, 2016). The nation’s most famous Carnival artist (or more correctly Mas Man), Peter Minshall, entitled his 1999 Carnival band *The Lost Tribe* because, ‘I have a little band of followers. You could call them a tribe…and more and more in the past several years we have found ourselves, me and my tribe, sort of feeling a little odd, a little strange, a little different’ (Minshall, 2000, p.96). Here we use this context-specific conceptualisation of a specific tribe that is both visible but somehow ‘a little different’ to mean a group that is simultaneously part of the established community but yet overlooked. From this position we examine what it is to belong to one particular tribe - the ‘teaching-only’ academic position, locally known as ‘instructor’.

The number of instructor or teaching-only academic positions has increased significantly in countries like Australia and the UK, such that in 2012, 10 per cent of the academic workforce in Australian universities and 33 per cent of the academics in UK universities were on teaching-only contracts (Probert, 2013; Locke, 2014). The development of teaching-only academics has brought new pay scales (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016) and new terms and conditions of employment (McBurnie, 2001). This expansion in the university sector has cleared figurative space for these new positions to arise, but in developing countries, where the systems currently in place were not designed to address these changes, problems arise (Steier, 2003). In a Caribbean context, university education is often viewed from a functional perspective where higher education is seen as a means of achieving financial security (Beckles, Perry & Whiteley, 2002; Blair, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2011). In seeing education as a transactional good, the Caribbean is not unlike other parts of the world where neoliberalism has led to the consideration of education from an economic perspective. For example, neoliberal policy ideas have emphasised institutional policy over teaching practice in the United States (Apple, 2011); in European education there has been a shift from a focus on individual development to a focus on developing self-governing European labourers (Mitchell, 2006), and the impact of neoliberalism is also being felt across many African nations where the emphasis has moved to funding and privatisation rather than knowledge generation (Brock-Utne, 2003). However, unlike many other parts of the world where there has been a history of political discourse and movement on the role of education, the Caribbean view of education has been consistently functional over the years since independence (c1960) (Beckles, Perry & Whiteley, 2002). With almost sixty years of focus on education as tool for economic prosperity, the role of those who teach in Caribbean universities has become dedicated to preparing students for the workplace and the advancement of this vision may be one of the drivers for the development of the instructor post.

A review of the Human Resources job allocation data of the university under study shows that, of those tasked to teach students, 12 per cent are instructors. The rest of the teaching is undertaken by lecturers (53%); senior lecturers (21%); professors (9%); technicians (3%) and teaching assistants (2%). The instructor’s role in this particular context ‘is primarily to ensure that students have a fundamental understanding of the basic concepts’ (Ali, 2011, p.50) while the lecturer takes on the more traditional role of ‘sage on the stage’. The instructor is broadly conceived of as a supporting-teacher role – overseen by the course co-ordinator who is usually a lecturer (Sastry et al. 2006). When one in every ten of the staff members teaching students is an instructor, this has clear implications for the teaching and learning experience in an institution.

Individuals in the instructor tribe, unlike Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA), often occupy a full-time paid role, however they are not tasked to do research. GTAs are involved in research as a component of their post-graduate programme and tend to teach fewer classes allowing them to concentrate on their own studies; however, instructors are employed to take on a full teaching load and any research undertaken, is expected to take place in their own time. The research and service activities that teaching-only academics undertake, are not seen as central to their role (Heller, 2012; Probert, 2013) and are moved to the periphery to facilitate the enactment of key job descriptions. However, while a job description may suggest a focus on teaching, the students that instructors teach have affective needs and thus, the instructor is also likely to find themselves supporting the institution’s service needs. These teaching-only positions therefore occupy rather liminal territory, as students perceive the day-to-day teaching practice of these academics to be on a par with those employed as lecturers in full teaching-research roles (Kendall & Schussler, 2012). These tribal roles therefore, although institutionally unbundled, appear in practice, to be less clear cut. In such a situation there may be tension between how the instructor is defined and what they actually do.

**Identities and job roles**

Notions of ‘identity’ are always temporal and contextual (Clegg, 2008) and this may be further compounded in institutions where a division of academic roles exists. This division of staff into blurry categories creates a vast Venn diagram of academic identities and somewhat ironically, leaves the modern unbundled university with identity overlaps. The concept of ‘identity’ encompasses how an individual internalises and presents their many facets and how these are interpreted by others (Gee, 2001). The forming of identity has personal and professional dimensions (Monrouxe, 2010) and is refined by experience and context (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Questions of legitimacy are key to the development of academic identity and are influenced by disciplinary norms and institutional requirements (Jawitz, 2009). We might consider this legitimacy in two forms – intra-legitimacy and extra-legitimacy. In the former an individual can recognise and value their role and purpose; however, in the latter, an individual’s role and purpose are validated by another person.

Job roles within higher education attempt to define the tasks undertaken by each tribe but, in practise, these ascribed roles tend to be more fluid, as each individual constitutes their own identity within an institution (Archer, 2008). In the modern university, role fragmentation caused by the unbundling of academic roles has led to a diffusion of power (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999) and the establishment of a tribal hierarchy. It is in this divergence that instructors are left to try to forge an identity and establish significance as a tribe. Macfarlane (2011) highlights this role fragmentation in reporting that there is a ‘divergence taking place between the identity of many of those working in higher education and their role’ (p.61). The competing and contradicting demands in modern universities can cause identity tension (Winter & O’Donohue, 2012). In such an environment, individuals are tasked to find a niche that meets their own needs whilst simultaneously following organisational policies and procedures (Henkel, 2005).

Change in the higher education sector has led to many reforms and it is important for universities to grasp the significance of these changes in relation to the way that those within the sector view, construct and operationalise themselves (Clegg, 2008; Coaldrake, 2000). While the tripartite identity of a lecturer seems somewhat established, legitimacy issues exist for the instructor, leaving this role perceived differently by different individuals. The role of lecturer is a known commodity. It is established, plainly negotiated and has the advantage of being normalised by time. People have a sense of what a lecturer is. From a study of online and traditional academics Briggs (2005) was able to develop the Generic Role model that classified eight core academic roles and 32 peripheral roles where ‘the core roles [are] common across universities and academics whatever the learning environment’ (p.266). It is unrealistic that these eight roles are equally distributed, as some roles are likely to be individually constructed as being more significant to day-to-day practice. Jacobs and Jacobs (2014) tested the Generic Role model with academics in the Science Faculty of a South African university and found that, of the eight core roles, the one that participants tended to gravitate towards was that of ‘Teacher’ and the one they rated lowest was that of ‘Consultant’. In this work, we take this further and use the core roles of Briggs’ Generic Role model (see Table 1) as a tool for examining the institutional and individual conceptualisations of the role of the instructor tribe.

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| --- | --- |
| **Core role** | **Peripheral roles** |
| **Team worker** | Contributor; Collaborator: Supporter |
| **Teacher** | Facilitator; Instructor; Assessor; Enabler; Reflector |
| **Knowledge Expert** | Subject specialist; Acknowledged expert; Information shaper |
| **Planner** | Coordinator; Course developer; Curriculum planner; Marketer |
| **Administrator** | Organizer; Supervisor; Resource monitor; Planner/Securer |
| **Researcher** | Investigator; Reflector; Creator; Communicator |
| **Counsellor** | Mentor; Student support; Personal tutor; Adviser |
| **Consultant** | Expert partner; Support evaluator |

Table 1. Generic Role model delineating the eight core roles of an academic (adapted from Briggs, 2005).

Briggs (2005) does not define what an academic is in relation to institutional job descriptions but, instead, focuses on the roles that an academic is expected to do. In an unbundled higher education environment, where the job of being an academic has become splintered, it therefore seems fitting to explore specific tribal experiences using Briggs’ Generic Role model. The role of the ‘teaching-only’ position is vague, as there is little shared sense of what this might be. Thus the role of ‘instructor’ exists in a hinterland of identity; has little sense of personal agency, and appears to have become hidden in plain sight. In this paper we problematise this situation within the Caribbean context and ask, *How is the role of the academic instructor conceptualised both at the institutional and individual level?*

**Methodology**

The participants in this study were either instructors (teaching-only academics) or lecturers (including senior lecturers and professors) within the university under study. Instructors, mostly possessed Masters-level degrees and had been in their posts for an average of three years, compared to lecturers, who had Doctorate degrees and were, on average, in their positions for more than five years.

The university staff directory listed a total of 44 instructors and 307 lecturers. A group email was sent to all instructors and another to all lecturers asking them if they would like to take part in this project. The emails were identical except that one referred to the population as ‘instructors’ and another as ‘lecturers’. The use of targeted emails was purposeful, as it prevented any errors in population identification. The emails gave a brief overview of the project; guidance on informed consent and a hyperlink to an online questionnaire. The questionnaire had a further statement regarding ethics and consent and a set of instructions on how to complete the sections. Overall, we received responses from 26 instructors and 77 lecturers. This represents a response rate of 59 per cent for those in the role of instructor and 25 per cent for those in the role of lecturer. In an effort to establish how the role of the instructor was conceptualised, data was drawn from three areas: (1) Local document review; (2) Participants’ quantitative rating of the roles that make up their jobs, and (3) Lecturers’ qualitative descriptions of the role of the instructor.

***Data collection and analysis***

Data collection involved the examination of documents and participant ratings on roles undertaken. The first aspect of data involved the review or public documentation. The documents examined were limited to publicly available job adverts for academic positions (lecturer and instructor) at the university under study. We analysed the usage of the terms representing the core roles identified in the Briggs’ (2005) Generic Role model in the role descriptions of the job adverts. The eight core roles were used as a template that allowed us to score the frequency of usage of words related to the core roles in the advertisements. We reviewed the documents that were ‘live’ at the time of the research. In total, five advertisements for instructor positions and ten adverts for lecturer position were found and examined. The core role descriptors were scored based on them being clearly stated (2), implied (1) or not stated (0) in the documents.

The second part of data collection involved an online survey tool designed to encourage anonymous and open responses, with a short turn-around time for increased participation. The survey was completed by both groups of participants – lecturers and instructors. The survey consisted of initial biodata questions followed by a question which required participants to *Rate how important each role is to your position at the university*. The options listed as responses to this question, were the core roles drawn from Briggs’ Generic Role model and participants rated themselves in these eight roles. Participants’ responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale including 0 (not applicable) and ranging from 1 (not important) to 10 (essential).

The final part of the data collection asked lecturers to describe their understanding of the role of the instructor. This question was asked in the online survey using an open text box without prompts. We only asked the lecturer to complete this part of the project as we felt that this would be a useful tool for discovering how obvious the work of the instructor tribe was to others. The qualitative (open text) responses, were then coded using the eight core roles from the Briggs’ Generic Role model.

***Bias and limitations***

This was a self-selecting survey which may have led to some biases in the responses which are likely to come from those with some form of interest (either vested or contingent); however this study does not claim to be representative – rather it seeks to give a clear depiction of the perspectives of the two participant cohorts. Brady and Collier (2010) report that concerns over self-selection bias can be distracting and focussing on this area suggests a statistical rather than an interpretative paradigm. Since this research seeks local truths rather than universal truths the self-selection of participants is not as important as the messages that participants share. In this way, validity is not about the quantity of data or the generalisability of data but is about the honest and reflective relationship between researcher and data where the focus is on clarity of method. Here validity is determined by whether an instrument measures what a researcher intended it to measure (Pitney, 2004). It is interesting that the percentage of instructors who completed the questionnaire was more than double that of the percentage of lecturers and this might speak to a division in the two job identities; however since we have no data as to why participants chose to complete, this area is left unexplored.

**Results**

***Local document review***

Table 2 indicates the tabulated results of the document review, where core roles were scored based on their occurrence in the documents. The roles of *Knowledge expert*, *Teacher* and *Team worker* were clearly stated in the job adverts, common to the work of both instructors and lecturers. Of the eight roles in Briggs’ model, only four were explicitly stated to be part of the work of the instructor, whereas five roles were identified as part of the lecturers’ job requirements. Although Briggs’ model stated that *Consultant* was a core role, no reference to this was found in any of the examined documents. The results, as shown in Table 2, highlight the shared and unique activities undertaken by these two tribes based on their job descriptions as determined by the document review. These findings are not particularly surprising, but offer an insight into the conceptualization of these roles by the institution in which this study was performed.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Team Worker** | **Teacher** | **Knowledge Expert** | **Planner** | **Administrator** | **Researcher** | **Counsellor** | **Consultant** |
| **Instructor** |  |  |  |  |  - |  - |  |  - |
| **Lecturer** |  |  |  |  |   |  |  - |  - |
|  Clearly stated;  Implied; - Omitted |

Table 2. Document review of core roles for instructors and lecturers.

***Instructor and lecturer quantitative ratings against core roles***

In their self-analysis against the list of core roles, all participants (lecturers and instructors) reported that all eight roles were key aspects of their practice (scoring all 5/10 or higher). Of these eight roles only three roles, *Knowledge expert*, *Teacher* and *Team worker* were rated as highly important by both tribes (scoring in the upper quartile). Only instructors rated the role of *Planner* in the upper quartile and only lecturers rated the role of *Researcher* in the upper quartile. The bar chart (Figure 1) illustrates how lecturers and instructors rated individual roles using Briggs’ model, presenting a more holistic insight into the way that the two groups perceive themselves. In the chart, the scale represents the combined rating against the eight core roles of all the participants in each tribe. Here we can see that the instructor and lecturer ratings of four roles, *Team worker, Consultant, Counsellor* and *Knowledge expert* were on a par (with both groups scoring *Consultant* lowest overall). Lecturers rated the role of researcher much higher than instructors did, whereas instructors rated the roles of *Teacher*, *Planner* and *Administrator* more highly.



Figure 1. Lecturer and instructor self-perception quantitative ratings against eight core roles.

***Qualitative descriptions of how lecturers perceived the role of instructors***



Figure 2. Breakdown of lecturers’ perspectives on the roles undertaken by instructors.

Sixty-four lecturers responded to the question asking for their qualitative descriptions of the role of the instructor tribe. However only 52 responses were assessed as usable based on completeness of the answers. Responses were coded using Briggs’ core roles, the results of which are represented in Figure 2. In total 40 per cent of coded data drawn from the lecturers indicated that they considered *Teacher* to be the primary role of the instructor. This is highlighted in lecturers’ qualitative statements where they describe the role of the instructor as a ‘facilitator of learning’; someone responsible for ‘delivering the course’ and an individual ‘primarily focussed on teaching’. Nineteen percent of the data indicates that lecturers considered instructors to provide a supporting or assisting role, interpreted here as a *Team worker.* The lecturers described instructors as someone who ‘assists’, ‘helps’ and ‘supports’ a lecturer. The roles of *Administrator* and *Researcher* were mentioned with similar amounts (8%) of the coded data. *Planner* was coded at 9 per cent and *Counsellor* at 10 per cent; however, only 6 per cent of responses indicated lecturers felt being a *Knowledge expert* was part of the instructor role.

**Findings**

In this study we examined how the role of the instructor is conceptualised both at the institutional and individual level by applying Briggs’ (2005) Generic Role model as a tool for analysing institutional and participant data. This study had a high response rate with 59 per cent of instructors and 25 per cent of lecturers in the institution taking part. The document review highlighted the shared importance of many core roles common to both tribes – the main differences being that the role of *Counsellor* was described as core to the job of instructor whereas the roles of *Researcher* and *Administrator* were considered to be core to the job of lecturer. The quantitative ratings produced by the 26 instructors and 77 lecturers showed broadly similar results but showed that instructors rated the roles of *Teacher*, *Administrator* and *Planner* slightly higher than lecturers did. In the lecturer’s rating of the instructors, the core roles revealed their conceptualisation of the instructors primarily as *Teacher*, a result similar to that in the quantitative ratings given by instructors.

The three data sources suggest that there is ambiguity between the espoused and enacted roles of the instructor. The quantitative and qualitative data suggests that both lecturers and instructors have a similar perspective on what they feel the role of the instructor involves. However, there are some differences between how the institution describes the role of the instructor against how lecturers and instructors see this role in practice. Table 3 offers a summary of the institutional and instructor perspectives and shows that there are clear discrepancies in the way that the institution and the individual instructors perceive the various roles undertaken by instructors.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Team Worker** | **Teacher** | **Knowledge Expert** | **Planner** | **Administrator** | **Researcher** | **Counsellor** | **Consultant** |
| **Institutional perspective** |  |  |  |  |  - |  - |   |  - |
| **Instructor perspective** |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |  - |
|  Core job role;  Peripheral job role; - Not a job role |

Table 3. Summary of institutional and instructor perspectives on the role of the instructor.

The analysis shows some ambiguity regarding the role of *Administrator*. Both sets of quantitative ratings show *Administrator* to be an important role for the instructor's job; however, there was no evidence in the document review that the institution saw this as relating to the instructor role. The core role that presented another area of uncertainty and rated lowest across all analyses, was that of *Consultant*. This role was not mentioned in the documentation for either tribe, nor did either tribe perceive this as being part of the instructor’s role. Further, in the quantitative ratings the two tribes rated this role with similar uncertainty. There might be a number of reasons for this – one of which might be connected with the institution itself and how it models its consultancies. Many institutions in the developed world have their own consultancy group and adopt an income generation model but this model is very new in the university under study and few members of staff are involved in any institutional consultancy, so considering oneself to ‘be’ a consultant might be unlikely. Another possible issue may be in Briggs’ model itself, where Jacobs and Jacobs (2014) found that participants struggle to identify with the role or term ‘consultant’ in an academic setting. Similarly, in our study, the disconnect with this role is reflected in the low range of responses, resulting in a skewed score that may not truly reflect the nuances of the actual role. In revising Briggs’ model, consideration should be given to the re-categorization of this role as a peripheral and not a core role, or the complete omission of this role from the model.

Although this study focused on one university in Trinidad and Tobago, our findings and broad data trends are similar to the findings of Jacobs and Jacobs (2014) while investigating a very different academic environment in South Africa. Research on teaching-only positions in Australian universities (Probert, 2013) and Kendall and Schussler’s (2012) work in the USA also support our general findings. As stated above, modification of some role descriptors and further testing of Briggs’ model in a number of contexts may help establish its veracity as a tool for investigating the perceived and actual work of those employed in various academic posts.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The unbundling of academic roles has led to a number of specialised academic positions. These various positions are bound together by shared practices and conventions to form tribes. Different academic tribes may be employed under different titles but parts of their roles seem to overlap. In our study, these contested arenas appear populated by instructors, where undocumented tasks are often part of their everyday professional experience. With various professional staff tasked to do various jobs to meet the various challenges identified by their various managers, unbundled roles can become muddled and what it means to belong to a specific academic tribe can become a very personal construct. Thus the unbundling of roles has simultaneously blurred academic identity and left some staff on the periphery – unsure of their role and unsure of the support that they should expect (Coaldrake, 2000; Probert, 2013).

There is clearly a difference between espoused and enacted roles and an individual working in any environment is likely to be socialised to the day-to-day practices of the workplace as they discover and develop their role. When an experienced worker transfers to a new work environment they take with them skills and experience but they soon learn that they need to fit in with the local codes of practice. It is here that we find some blurring between the day-to-day codes of practice and the institutionally defined job roles. This research found such blurriness in the gaps between the data developed from the examination of the institutional documentation and from individual sources. For instructors, the construction of their identity seems to occur in the territory between what is said and what is done. Job identity is shaped at the institutional level (Henkel, 2000; 2005) but it is also contextually negotiated (Clegg, 2008) and, as such, if the current conceptualisation of the role of the instructor is somewhat blurry, then future contestation may make this particular tribe even harder to identify. Delgaty (2017) suggests that the resolution to the tension between institutionally-defined roles and individually performed roles is to redefine them. If not, he states that academics will ‘“do what they have always done” which won’t benefit the institution or the students’ (p.30). Without some form of resolution, both instructors and lecturers are likely to feel tension between their espoused and enacted roles.

In examining how the role of the instructor at a university in Trinidad and Tobago is conceptualised both at the institutional and individual level we applied Briggs’ (2005) Generic Role model to organise and examine documentation and participant data. The pre-defined terms of Briggs’ model offered a template for our analysis and allowed us to apply a ‘language’ to the research. Our findings highlight evidence of blurred territorial boundaries as the role of the instructor appears to be conceptualised differently at the institutional and individual levels. Despite the bias towards ‘traditional’ teaching methods (Ali, 2011; Blair, 2012; Sastry et al., 2006) and the societal bias towards clarity of job roles regionally (Beckles, Perry & Whiteley, 2002), it would appear that those employed on teaching-only contracts may be doing much more than only teaching. Here we have shown that some of these enacted functions appear to be hidden from the institutional gaze and that, in the end, large parts of the work undertaken by those employed in teaching-only positions appear to be invisible to the institution.

Drawing from Minshall’s (2000) context-specific conceptualisation of a lost tribe to mean a group that is simultaneously part of the established community but somehow ‘a little different’ we can see that instructors may not be entirely lost or invisible but the institutional understanding of their everyday job roles appears somewhat opaque. The instructor tribe seems to be hidden in plain sight and this may be due, in part, to the disconnect between institutional expectations and the actual scope of an instructor’s practice. Instructors find themselves in a hinterland of identity where they need to have a range of academic skills in order to perform their job effectively, but their true form, even if expressed, is not recognised. Such a position is likely to have managerial and/or policy implications from which it is suggested that there needs to be an examination of ‘teaching-only’ positions and reflection on re-defining academic roles to cope with the changing higher education sector, as suggested by Delgaty (2017). Two possible changes suggest themselves: (1) instructors could work to robustly align their actual practice with their institutionally defined job roles, and (2) job descriptions could be modified to take account of the actual working practices of instructors. The first of these suggestions might lead to a change in the lived-experiences of students and might impact negatively on the learning environment. The second suggestion would change what ‘teaching-only’ actually means and might start a movement back towards a re-bundled academic identity.

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