

# CHALLENGING BELONGINGS FOR TEACHING AND EDUCATION FOCUSED ACADEMICS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM IN AUSTRALIA

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For several decades, higher education has been facing rapid change and successive challenges and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. To deliver in this resource constrained environment, academic workforce and academic roles are being reshaped. Teaching and education focused academic roles are rapidly increasing but come with both opportunities and challenges. A critical challenge for these academics is their capacity to “belong” to the academic community, when research, the currency which creates networks and communities has been removed from these academic careers. This study used the theoretical frameworks of resilience, adaptive capacity and cycles and psychological development and self-determination as powerful heuristics to analyse the experiences of nine teaching focused academics. This study found that the reality of the role was restricted autonomy, difficulties in evidencing individual competency and confusion about expertise. This study found that although all academics undergo adaptive cycles in response to stress, education-focused academics and women were perhaps most vulnerable to a range of stressors (Ross et al., 2022, 2023), including rigidity trap (Kinchin, 2022), pedagogic frailty (Kinchin & Winstone, 2017), terror of performativity (Ball, 2003) and finally “initiatives” (Hargreaves, 2008). Overall long-term education focused academics are at risk in the university ecosystem, even after their heroic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While theory predicts greater academic role diversity will increase institutional resilience, adaptive capacity, inclusivity and belonging, this is not necessarily a given without changes to the higher education ecosystem in Australia in which academics operate.

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