

WHO DO THEY THINK THEY ARE? INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CASUAL TEACHING STAFF

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Casual academics teaching staff, such as tutors and laboratory demonstrators, play a vital role in our undergraduate teaching programs. Indeed, this casual academic workforce often forms the vast majority of the academic teaching staff at most universities, especially in the first-year units/courses. In particular, casual laboratory teaching staff possess several responsibilities such as, ensuring adherence to the health and safety policies, assessing student performance and output, developing undergraduate students' practical and transferable skills, mentoring and correcting misconceptions in theoretical understanding (Herrington & Nakhleh, 2003; Rodrigues & Bond-Robinson, 2006). Literature suggests that there is a strong positive correlation between how students interact with their laboratory demonstrator and how these same students rank their interest in (and attitudes towards) their undergraduate science courses (Pentecost et al., 2012; Osbourne, Simon & Collins, 2003). What is unclear however: how do these casual academics perceive their own teaching roles and how does this influence both their own teaching practices and the learning environment experienced by the students? A recent study undertaken by Flaherty et al. (2017) showed the positive impact of psychological empowerment on both the self-efficacy of the teaching staff and its ability to create a more positive, student-centered teaching environment. Preliminary quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires of laboratory teaching staff at Monash University and the University of Sydney have been collected investigating the perceptions of our casual teaching staff (George-Williams, 2019; Spreitzer, 1995; George-Williams, 2020), particularly towards their own teaching roles. The results of these studies will be discussed alongside potential future directions for this study.

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