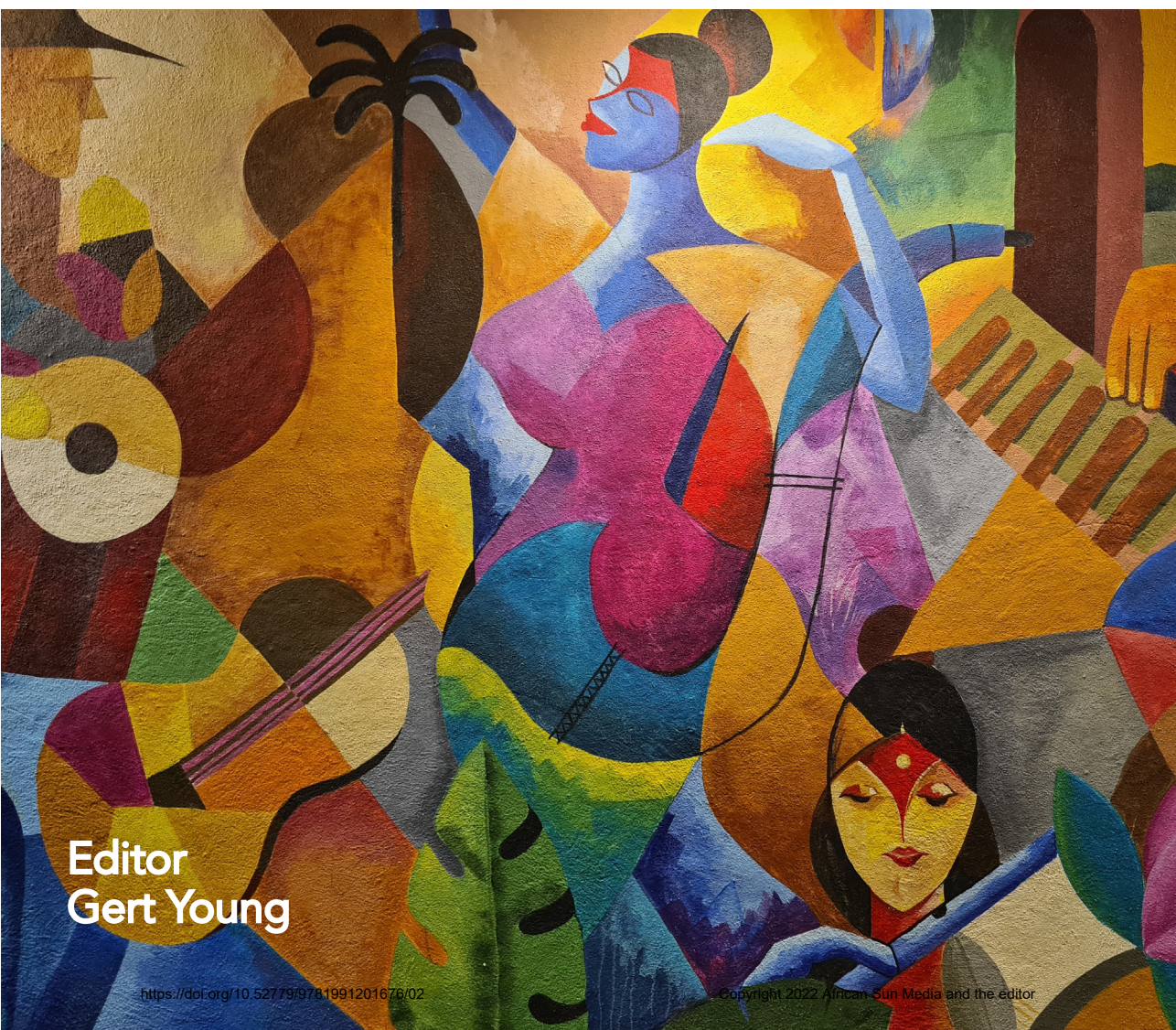


Academic Development and its Practitioners

A View from the Inside



Editor
Gert Young

Abbreviations

APQ	Academic planning and Quality Assurance
BLC	Blended learning coordinator
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CHEC	Cape Higher Education Consortium
CLT	Centre for Learning Technologies
CoP	Community of practice
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DLTE	Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement
DRD	Division for Research Development
ECA's	Early Career Academics
FIGs	Focused Interest Groups
FIRLT	Fund for Innovation and Research in Learning and Teaching
FMF	Fees Must Fall
FYA	First-Year Academy
GAs	Graduate Attributes
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HELTASA	Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HoD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LC	Language Centre
LCT	Legitimation Code Theory
NAA	Newly appointed academics
NRF	National Research Foundation
PASS	Professional and Administrative Support Services

PGDip	Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education
PL	Professional learning
PREDAC	Professional Educational Development for Academics
REEP	Recommended Engineering Education Practices
SAHEI	South African Higher Education Institution
SAS	Student Academic Support Services
SoEL	Scholarship of Educational Leadership
SOTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
SU	Stellenbosch University
T&L	Teaching and Learning
UBC	University of British Columbia
UniEd	Division of University Education

IMPERFECT ERASURE

How does it feel to be an academic developer?

Melanie Skead

*Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
"Hurry ..." now to stand still,
to be here. (Sarton, 1978:191)*

1 Introduction

This is my walkabout. It is my coming into and working in the field of academic development. It is a musing on what I have learnt along the way in the hope of enriching the conversation about¹ what it means to "be" an academic developer. In this chapter, I turn to authentic encounters in my work as academic developer. I do so partly in response to my deepening concern that the epistemological turn or glittering knowledge stars (Barnett, 2011:117) we might follow in pursuit of certainty in the academic development field and the 21st century University, might have come to overshadow important dispositions and qualities among those who work in the field. "What starts as a purely epistemological matter turns out to an ontological matter" (Barnett, 2011:42). This claim aligns closely with my interests in this chapter: In order to become "academic [development] entrepreneurs", we should "live happily with fluidity, a state of perpetual ontological voyaging" (43). In taking up this challenge, I ask: Are we perhaps clouding our sense of self, of how it *feels* to be perpetually "voyaging" and what the nature of this kind of *being and working* might be?

1 I use "academic development" and "academic developer" in full recognition that these terms signify "the colonial mantle of 'developer' of others" (Manathunga, 2006:28). However, they are widely used in South African literature in the field. The preferred designations in my current work context are "teaching and learning enhancement" and "academic advisor".

In taking up these questions, I reflect on my lived experience as academic developer. I trace my transitions in a field that by its very nature exists largely “to serve” (an)other and suggest that academic developers are at risk of negating self-care in service of care for others. Through adopting this perspective, I set out to enrich my sense of self, to form nuanced knowledge of the field, and to write my academic-developer-self into being. I do so in the hope that I might add to the conversation about the nature of academic development work and the lives of those who do this work by spotlighting the “inner landscape” (Palmer, 2017:5) of the academic developer. I want to “encourage daring and imagination” and reiterate “that ... what is to count *as* knowledge should always be open to critical appraisal; ... that new perspectives should be permitted even if (or especially if) they frighten the old guard” (Barnett, 2011:27).

For some time now, I have been troubled by the “invisible divide” (Fyffe, 2018:363) in higher education, none more so than in my life as academic developer. I am aware of the peculiarities that come with the array of institutional structures and approaches to academic development work. In my experience, there is a clear divide between how academic developers are positioned in higher education institutions, and what kind of work they are expected to do. Many are appointed in “support” or “non-academic” positions but are expected to produce and publish research-based scholarship. They fulfil all “academic” roles (teaching, research and community outreach) but are not afforded the time or space for this work while they contribute to overarching strategic initiatives and provide assistance with a wide range of teaching, learning and assessment initiatives across whole institutions.

Here, I offer a personal exploration of my experiences as an academic developer in South African higher education so to find and voice my sense of self. It is my “coming to know” myself and the field through transitions that best describe my sense-making attempts in a fragmented, ambiguous space. I identify these transitions as enculturation, intuitive practice and a scholarly disposition. This pathway has shaped my being and working as academic developer in five South African universities over the space of thirty-two years during which I have formed a sense of how this kind of work is contouring across our landscape. Through introspective narrative and inductive reasoning, I attempt to highlight occurrences and experiences that have significantly shaped my “becoming”.

I use autoethnography and reflective narrative as means of self-enquiry and care to write my existence and experiences as academic developer into being. I think of this act as a “turn to self”, of my “being (as) an academic developer” with the purpose of tracing the cultivation of (my)self in my work across space and time. The kind of autoethnography I draw on in this paper is an “emergent” yet acknowledged “writing practice [that] involves highly personalised accounts” and drawing on one’s own experiences “to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (Holt, 2003:18). In drawing on this interpretation of ethnography, I highlight purposively selected key events to uncover and illustrate particular realisations, experiences and suggestions that I might offer the academic development community at large, particularly to novice academic developers. I view this paper as an autoethnographic case study in the “tradition of ethnographic research” (Duncan, 2004:3). According to Das and Mullick (2015:265), “autoethnography is a term that has been in use for at least three decades and includes a wide range of research and writing approaches which connect the personal to the cultural”. In this vein, I purposefully privilege self-reflection so as to distil orientations and attitudes to a “fractured field” (Fyffe, 2018:355) that also fracture the self.

Academic development is rife with “discourses of utility” (Peseta, 2007:16) constructed by those external to the field. Like Peseta, I want to “write richly ... [which is] itself an act of research” (2007:16). I want to think and write about “how the work itself feels” (2007:16) in the hope of “producing meaningful, accessible and evocative research grounded in personal experience” (Ellis, et al., 2011:274). I understand this approach as a way to “resist colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture” and then “leaving to write about the culture” (274). It opens possibilities for creating “a ‘new self’ in the world” (Wilcox, 2009:128) so that I might use my agency to move forward through looking back. Wilcox (2009) affirms that we must care for ourselves in a context that is “inadequate” in supporting “emotional, holistic, psychological and spiritual growth ... in performative higher education contexts” (2009:128). Self-study and critical reflection on our histories, our beliefs, values and practices, are fitting ways for the kind of transformative learning necessary for such growth.

I posit that the telling of one’s story is knowledge-building. Africa’s ancient oral tradition is central to an authentic post-colonial research paradigm. It is a “genre of thought and knowledge” (Tuwe, 2015) representative of the narrator’s lived experience and worldview, a means of “discovering and uncovering knowledge” (Elabor-Idemudia in Tuwe, 2015). Substantively, I draw on Foucault’s “care of the self” (1986) as risk-taking and thinking about the self critically, as the “labour of thought with itself as object” (1986:62). This kind of care is an act of resistance and struggle: “Performance has no room for caring” (Ball, 2003:224). In an era of performativity, academic developers struggle with the practices of performativity (Ball & Olmedo, 2013:86). In my academic development work, I am perpetually in tension with the demand for strategy and “measurable performance”, and that what I do might “not be captured by or valued within the metrics of accountability” (Ball, 2003:223). To be “otherwise to” the demand for measurable “performative worth” (Ball, 2003:218), leaves me questioning the “panopticism (of quality and excellence)” (219) that has become pivotal to the language of the neo-liberal university. It is perhaps in response to this struggle that I turn to Foucault’s premise: “the experience of self ... is the experience of a pleasure that one takes in oneself” (Foucault, 1986:66). “Because language has a performative function, speaking the truth about oneself also makes, constitutes or constructs forms of one’s self. By these discursive means and through these technologies a human being turns him or herself into a subject” (Besley, 2005:85).

In exploring this experience, I purposefully use self-enquiry as a process of “gaining access” to myself as academic developer. I want to discern how it feels (to me) to be an academic developer.

What follows is a series of reflective vignettes interspersed with theorised narrative and a scholarly thread woven through this paper. I draw on my personal journal and first-person accounts of defining moments and events in my academic development story. I hope to speak my truth through this account of the transitions and layered becoming I have worded, first to myself and now to my reader.

2 The academic nomad

As is commonplace in academic development, my entry into the field was for reasons other than wanting to “become” an academic developer. After the institution where I had been lecturing

English Studies for thirteen years was earmarked for closure, I sought and found an alternative position in higher education, drawn to what felt most comfortable. After relocating, I applied for the position of "Supplemental Instruction Co-ordinator". Neither this designation nor the idea of academic development resonated with any work I had done before. I hoped that my lecturing experience would give enough to start out with. I had the years of lecturing English and my intuition to guide me. On the second day after taking up this position, I was sent off for a three-day "training" workshop. The three days formed the total of my formal "induction" as novice academic developer. Intuitively, I sensed that I faced self-reinvention if I were to succeed at what promised to be a new way of being, knowing and relating to the higher education world. In the absence of formal or informal induction into "academic development", I relied heavily on the information I gathered during the three training days and focussed on a single student "support" programme. Strangely, I did not feel disrupted or threatened by the prospect of shifting my established identity as Senior Lecturer and Head of a multi-campus academic department. Working in an "Academic Development Centre" did not trouble me and I simply introduced myself as a programme coordinator, a designation that did not seem unfamiliar to colleagues. I was inexperienced again, had no theoretical basis for my work, no formal qualification in the field and no sense of community in my immediate context. I had transitioned from a seasoned lecturer, to a complete neophyte. However, I soon realised that my colleagues were also fairly new to this kind of work. They only had a few years of service in the field yet somehow appeared to be confident in their "doing" academic development. In these early years, I aimed to establish credibility through simply doing the work. Knowing that I had been appointed in an academic position with academic responsibilities and privileges, yet doing academic development work rather than lecturing, added to my sense of pseudo-confidence and familiarity. It never crossed my mind that I was no longer a "real academic".

It appears that few of us, if any, set out to "become" academic developers. It is not an undergraduate field of study and no qualifications or accreditation comparable to those in other "professions" exist. As Fraser indicated twenty years ago, academic developers she had interviewed at the time came into the field "quite by accident" (Fraser, 1999:96). That this kind of work exists at all seems to be accidental in itself. Similarly to lecturers, academic developers are not required to be formally qualified to do their work. South African academic developers do not have to be accredited professionally in any way. The range and level of qualifications they hold when coming into the field are extensive but not necessarily education-related. Experience in a teaching-research position or relevant work-related experience and willingness to learn-as-you-go, often suffice.

My *walkabout* as academic developer has effected changes in me that were both unexpected and uncomfortable. In a sense, "not knowing" instilled a pseudo-confidence in my being and doing. At the outset, I did not question what it means to be an academic developer beyond doing what I could in order to help others "fix" what they thought needed "fixing". Not being a novice in higher education after 13 years as lecturer and supervisor of English studies at under- and post-graduate levels, I was confident in my ability to work across institutional levels as expected in a 'multifaceted "rag bag" profession' (Kensington-Miller, et al., 2012:124). I sensed that formal qualification in the academic development field was not valued or required and that my strengths as a "practically oriented problem-solver" (125) would suffice.

Academic developers have been likened to a “chameleon on a tartan rug” (Handal, 2008:64), leading to “a chameleon-like existence” (Van Schalkwyk & McMillan, 2016:207) in a “strange, in-between space” that challenges them “to carve out a hybrid identity in the third space” (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018:30). Peseta likens the academic development project to that of “a *hybrid encounter*” (2005:212), an impression that has infused subsequent explorations of the enigmatic space inhabited by those who do academic development work. Initial excitement at the opportunity of using one’s work for justice and equity seems easily disrupted once it hits home that taking up this kind of work might be a question of “doing before being [and knowing]” (Kensington-Miller, et al., 2012:121).

Disruption was still to come. Two years on, the rapidly-changing South African higher education landscape took me on a different path. Our campus was incorporated into another university. We had little or no choice, no agency and no negotiating power. Overnight, I was “redeployed” from a research-intensive, highly esteemed university, to a teaching-intensive, troubled and under-resourced university that had barely survived its tumultuous past. This time, the canvas was blank.

This institution was venerated for very different, political-historical reasons as many revered South African leaders had traversed its halls. This was not “my history” as I had been raised in “Apartheid South Africa” during the 1960s and 70s. It had no academic developers, programmes or resources in place. We had no office space or equipment and drifted across campus in search of respite from the African sun. I recall the scorching heat more vividly than anything about these early days. Long-serving academic staff members were at pains to reiterate that academic development programmes “would never work” on their campus. The very notion did not fit into the established academic culture. Still, I had a job to do. I intuitively set out to create structures and opportunities for students to help each other learn, especially in “high-risk subjects”. The years I had spent working with students in “townships”² at the start of my career, left an indelible awareness of the injustices these youngsters faced. I was not going to give up without a fight.

I sensed that this harsh space was at once an opportunity and a responsibility to continue working with youth who made their way into higher education, often in dire circumstances, but drawn by the prospects it signalled. I could not shake a growing sense of unease, fed by cynical and defensive reactions to my well-intentioned suggestions for “supporting” our students, especially in courses known to have high failure rates. Students were expected to acquire academic writing competencies without explicitly being taught these conventions or the required disciplinary discourses. I found myself angry at the unfairness of a system that would value the written word to the exclusion of other forms of assessment in a context where the majority of students did not enjoy enabling opportunities to meet the set expectations for academic success and who did not speak English as primary language. From my background

2 Townships: According to Pernegger & Godehart (2007:2), “the term ‘township’ has no formal definition but is commonly understood to refer to the underdeveloped, usually (but not only) urban, residential areas that during apartheid were reserved for non-whites (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) who lived near or worked in areas that were designated ‘white only’”. Townships are relatively unique as a “South African ‘invention’ but they were inspired by colonial town planning” (6) and remain a “permanent part of South Africa’s urban landscape” (22).

in English studies and lecturing, I knew that this factor alone could mean the difference between success and failure for students who had been subjected to under-resourced and relegated schooling. Many were first-generation higher education students and were viewed as "deficient". I recall innumerable conversations during which the admission of these students to university study was questioned: They simply did not "belong", they were not university "material", we were "setting them up for failure" and they were "unmotivated", with poor study habits. Most significantly, "standards were dropping" in higher education. It troubled me that in a post-apartheid era, an unwillingness to understand our students' lived experiences and (his)stories, remained rigid. Surprisingly, I could recall similar comments made by my own lecturers in the late 1970s when I entered higher education, fresh from school, in what was then a strictly enforced separatist higher education system in Apartheid South Africa. My surprise stems from my privileged schooling followed by a sense of being deficient in a higher education space. This time around, the deficit seemed targeted at students from marginalised communities, largely for not fitting into preconceived ideas of what a university student should be in the years immediately following South Africa's political transition. Inversely, my own transition as academic developer from a historically advantaged to an under-resourced institution was so deeply vexing that I found myself persisting to prove the nay-sayers wrong. And I did.

The history of academic development in South Africa is inextricably linked to its political trajectory. Following a new political dispensation in April 1994, expectations were high that an integrated higher education system would create more equitable conditions for all South Africans. "Liberation before education" gave way to shifting "discursive forces of 'equity and redress', 'development' and 'academic standards'" (Naidoo, 1998:369). Access policies were aimed at increasing participation rates of groups that had historically been denied access such as black and female students (370). These competing agendas have persisted in academic development work. While well-intended from its earliest conceptions (Carrim, 1994), the achievement of equity and redress remains problematic. These early notions of access have been broadened to include epistemological and ontological access but, as Carrim (1994) predicted, "the canonical bases of knowledge systems" and "the cultural capital of such knowledge systems" have indeed continued "into the new South Africa" (286). Similarly, Naidoo (1998) concluded that "while the system appears flexible", there is a "hidden regulative mechanism" at play that sustains "deeply rooted values of elitism to be implemented and reinforced" (380). "The South African university system is and will remain a highly differentiated system" (380).

Carrim's (1994) account of a "pedagogic experience" he had "with a black, male student [Hani] in 1987" is an interesting window into the early stage of transition in the South African higher education landscape. He concludes that Hani "was symbolically violated in his educational encounters" at a historically white university. Through academic support, they had been able to "permeate the dominant [Western] cultural capital" but failed to change it. It was "reinforced and reproduced" (Carrim, 1994:286). This sentiment was brought to the fore pertinently during the student protests that started anew in 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. At its heart, lie "untransformed colonial institutions and the entire post-1994 legacy of neo-liberalism" (Ray, 2016:390).

During the first broad phase of my work as academic developer recounted here, I did not foresee the events of 2015 and naively believed that the changes in higher education and my immediate context, would go a long way to create more equitable conditions for all students in South Africa. The work I was doing, and the relationships I was building with students and academics, gave me hope in the face of overwhelming odds. *Academic development could make the difference.*

3 The intuitive practitioner

After five years of working with a strong focus on "student development", I realised that there were no formal opportunities for me to work more closely with lecturers. During the earlier years, I had done some "innovative" work by drawing lecturers into spaces where the focus was on peer facilitators and their facilitation practices. I recall these "shared learning" sessions as exceptionally meaningful during my early years in academic development. It troubled me that academic development work remained rigidly disjointed between "student" and "staff" development. I used an early conference presentation to focus on ways of integrating student and staff development, rather than focusing on one at the cost of the other. Nevertheless, I reached a threshold in my work and my own development where I became increasingly sceptical that the experiential knowledge I had gained during my early years in academic development was adequate for achieving credibility and constructing alternative responses to the increasing range and depth of the challenges we faced. Given the commonplace academic development positionality as a "non-academic" structure in South African higher education and one that initially had been in place at the institution where I worked, I could stay on and work within these constraints, or seek a different position at another institution. I subsequently took up a position as "Senior Manager" of a professional unit focusing on the development of teaching practices.

I was excited at the prospect of deepened self-development, new challenges and extended learning in the field. By now, I had no doubt that I would have to seek my own developmental opportunities and to consciously create spaces that would enable my growth. I joined a newly-merged multi-campus institution, uprooting my family and embracing the risk and vulnerability that came with this decision. I counted myself fortunate given the exodus of academic developers I observed being inadvertently forced out of academic development, often back to faculty-based lecturing positions, or into industry, once they encountered the rigidity of institutionalised academic development positionality. I set out to design a professional programme for academics across the institution, one that would offer sustained yet flexible opportunities to engage with core pedagogical concepts and practices. I had realised that ad hoc, shotgun academic development practices might impact the individual academics we managed to work with, but that we did not exercise sustained impact at institutional level. I was conscious of the power that academics held over what and how students learned and how choices we made might constrain student access and success.

At this point, I embraced an integrative approach to academic development and doggedly sought ways to bring disjointed academic development foci together in meaningful, symbiotic ways. Although I did not have a strong theoretical grounding to know why I wanted to work with academic development initiatives in this manner, my lived experience leading up to this

point convinced me that this was the way to go. Later, I would realise that I had been working intuitively, drawing on my gut feel and the experiential lessons I had learned in the roughly twenty-two years I had by now spent in higher education. For the first time in my trajectory as academic developer, I was formally appointed in a "non-academic" professional support position. "What's in a name?", I thought, as I embraced a new phase in my own development in a new context.

As I continued working on teaching development programmes, I became increasingly restless as I sensed even as a seasoned academic developer did not afford me the credibility I had enjoyed as lecturer. In the absence of formal scholarly opportunities for academic developers, I tried my hand at traditional forms of scholarship by way of conference presentations and papers for publication, neither of which I felt were particularly successful in building the standing and grounded scholarship I sought. I needed to find alternative ways of looking at and exploring the questions that troubled me in my work and to meet academics on their own turf.

In reflecting on this second phase in my academic development voyaging, I note that, like many academic developers, I systematically branched out to make my work "count" on a broader scale. Retaining my focus on working with students individually or in groups to enable their epistemic and cultural access to higher education did not effect the systemic change I had hoped for. I subsequently shifted my focus to collaborating more closely with lecturers. I was unaware that, elsewhere, a claim was made that after thirty years of faculty development, the collective impact was "nil" (Weimer, 2007:6).

4 A scholarly face

Unexpectedly, a call for applications for a newly-developed Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education for Academic Developers caught my eye. It had been designed by colleagues at a neighbouring institution and was the first formal opportunity to qualify myself as academic developer that I had seen. Although at the time I was not appointed on an academic contract, I was supported by the Director of the Centre which made all the difference. I found myself cautious, but excited, at the prospect of engaging in formal study sixteen years after completing my PhD, especially given an expectation of finally accessing the theoretical underpinning that I came to believe I lacked. For the next two years, my experience of seeking principled, research-based knowledge of the academic development field was at once daunting and exhilarating. On day one, we were "introduced" to Margaret Archer's Social Realist framework. It was a typical 35°C African summer's day and a defining moment. I sensed that I was moving beyond intuitive doing and being as an academic developer and that a new world was about to open up.

Before long, my certainties were questioned, my assumptions challenged and my emotions in turmoil. When I needed to, I slowed down to engage with difficult ideas, to immerse myself in complex theories and to try out an altogether foreign language. My first attempt at scholarly writing was an uncertain first step with mere glimpses of my familiar, confident voice. Yet, by the end of the first year, I was increasingly able to feed my newly formed ideas into my work. My voice deepened in meetings, in scholarly writing and in critiquing established ideas. I engaged differently with colleagues by pursuing the possibilities of scholarship and the power that it holds in the HE world.

After graduating, I took up a position as Senior Lecturer on academic appointment. Given the exceptional period of growth in myself as academic developer over the course of formal study, I had high expectations of myself in this new role. I would be able to teach on the qualification itself and saw this opportunity as the culmination of my long-term progression in the field. I could not have foreseen the disruption, ambivalence and unhomeliness I experienced in this phase and I found myself adrift, once again:

Invisible. Somehow I take up space but am not seen. Faceless, sufficiently alive to mourn the loss of "me". Space and air, invisible but for what occupies it. To exist invisibly, not seen or heard, is not new, yet different this time. Sufficiently alive to feel anger, mostly at myself. In seeking visibility, I have erased myself. I am disconnected, in agony that hurts my breath and the space I am taking up. Hope, loss brought me here. Those I have loved, those that left, those I left, those still left. In the space. A madwoman in the corner. There is no attic. Of filling the corner space where walls are blue and alien representations stare and stare. History, memorial, restoration, settler, responsibility, land, out. We glare at each other, in this space. I exist, sufficiently to eat, sleep, work, talk. All demanding all I have. No one else exists in my disconnect. None count. Does it take 20236 days to become an albatross? Sadder. Wiser says the poet. Wisdom does not aid invisibility. Is this what I chose, did it choose me? Grabbing at space, to defend existence, using energy that might give another life. One more worthy, more visible. (Reflective journal entry, 2015)

5 Imperfect erasure: The palimpsestuous nature of academic development

It strikes me that becoming an academic developer and writing about one's history of becoming, calls to mind the creation of a palimpsest: "material for writing on and wiping out ... parchment ... in which the original writing has been erased to make place for a second" (Onions, 1996: 643). The word itself derives from the Latin *palimpsestus* and has taken on the meaning of continuous "formation" (634) through reusing an old manuscript and reinscribing a new text over the partially-erased old text. Dillon (2005) observes that this process "is one of layering" but that "the *result* ... can be described [as] ... 'involved'" (244). My *walkabout* in becoming an academic developer as traced in this paper calls to mind the kind of "involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting" (Dillon, 2005:245) qualities of a palimpsest.

My shift from academic nomad to intuitive practitioner and eventually a scholar, might be thought of as a series of interlocking experiences that obscure without subsuming one another. De Quincey's (2001) impression of the palimpsest as "a membrane or roll cleansed of its manuscript by reiterated successions" (26) resonates with my impression of adopting a series of faces or trying on different mantles, over time, without completely erasing any. Like writers of old, I have attempted to reuse the same "text" by trying on different ways of being along with shifts in my perspectives, insights, values and knowledge. This account of my *walkabout* shows that the new does not replace the old but adds to what has already been traversed, inextricably retaining a sense of what has gone before. I recognise that transitioning from novice to scholar has culminated in a complex relationality of being and working as academic developer in distinct yet coextensive spaces in South African higher education academic development work.

The major phases in my growth as academic developer have deepened my understanding of the work of academic development. I realise that what we do privileges a particular kind of working in response to institutional expectations and positionality. Our work is contextually-bound so that with each new context, we experience a reinvention without erasing or negating our histories.

Although I identified three major shifts in my becoming, adopting the palimpsest as an interpretive mechanism in a post-colonial context has been useful in identifying yet another shift: A recognition of the limitations of a dominant scholarly disposition. At first, I imagined that this pathway would generate outright credibility, recognition and knowledge in my field of work. I would subsequently become and remain grounded in a stronger, more confident sense of self. I now view this propensity as another layer in my continuing voyage rather than a panacea for my being and becoming an academic developer. I recognise my *walkabout* as a "palimpsestuous" (Dillon, 2005:244) evolution in my academic development life. I have therefore come to question my earlier impression that theoretical knowledge (scholarship in the "scientific" or "research" university (Barnett, 2011:21) is to be valued at the expense of (self) care. In this sense, I am unexpectedly compelled to ask if, perhaps, I have bought into a skewed knowledge society (Barnett, 2011:21) at the expense of ontological considerations in an academic development existence.

The transitions I have undergone as academic developer have shaped me in significant ways. They have challenged my sense of self, of well-being and of affirmation in relational contexts. In response, I have "worn other people's faces" (Sarton, 1978:191) as I have inscribed layer upon layer of displacement and struggle in a highly contested field. Now, as I write this paper, I claim my personal experiences and my history as legitimate and necessary to my authentic self.

In each of the phases I have outlined, I was drawn by the "call" or "pull" of different "knowledges" (Barnett, 2011:117). As an academic nomad, I had viewed personal experience and opinions as the pathway to being a (good) academic developer since I viewed legitimacy as individual knowledge construction and learning/doing academic development in whatever way was most helpful or effective. Practical, experiential knowledge served to ease my way into the field. In time, another layer was added: That of academic development practitioner with increased competence to navigate the "unforeseen and unpredictable" (Barnett, 2011:117) complexities in South African higher education. Taking on a scholarly face and disposition in the third phase described in this paper, instilled hope that robust, cumulative engagement with the nature of knowledge and established theoretical perspectives (albeit from a range of disciplinary fields given the absence of a coherent knowledge base in academic development) would affirm my self-worth and empower me to find answers to seemingly intractable problems. I was encouraged by the promise that my encounter with "powerful knowledge" (Wheelahan, 2007:637) would bring me closer to 'thinking the unthinkable and the not-yet-thought' (Wheelahan, 2009:2). Clearly, in this *walkabout*, I have followed glittering epistemological stars (Barnett, 2011:117).

If ideas of knowledge that essentially discount the multifaceted nature of knowledge generation create a 'gap between evidence and practice' (Clegg, 2009:411), it has become crucial to consider alternative views, not only on 'usefulness' (Peseta, 2007:15), but also on the kinds of spaces that enable a new gaze on being and becoming in academic development. Martin et al., 2010:433 concur that 'how you feel turns out to be as important as what you know' (433).

6 Conclusion

My walkabout has deepened my understanding of the academic development field and the dynamics of the work itself. It has challenged me to delve deeply and reflect candidly on how I see myself, what my contribution might be, how I relate to what is required of me in my work and how I sustain myself. I have experienced “being alone”, being in the fray, *and* knowing that my “being (t)here” mattered. Through writing my story, I illustrate and explore major transitions within my growth as academic developer. I have used the writing process as “a wider lens” (Grant, 2007:275) on the academic development world, who I claim to be in this world and of “finding there is a new beginning” (Grant, 2007:36).

Through narrating my multi-layered and entwined self as nomadic neophyte, as intuitive practitioner and as scholar, I have come to think that academic development work demands a willingness to live, work and embrace “everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings [that] have fallen upon [me]” ...each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished” (De Quincey, 2011:28).

I now live and work in mindfulness of the “collisions of those successive themes” that form a “deep memorial [yet persistent] palimpsest”, at once “incongruous” and “fused into harmony” (De Quincey, 2011:28). This brings me to the present day in my *walkabout*: I am one, but many. I am a perpetual nomad, an intuitive practitioner and a scholar who recognises imperfect erasure as both natural and necessary to academic development work. I read my academic development account and my current work as parallel, neither fully replacing the other. In *not* doing so, I risk obscuring ungenerous academic development spaces that demand compliance from those who do this work. I wonder if the neo-liberal South African university has room for the inner life of the academic developer. Is it possible to flourish as who we truly are in a higher education context that seems to demand *perfect erasure* of our true selves in service of performativity? “Who is it that determines what is to count as...valuable, effective or satisfactory?” (Ball, 2003:216). This is an exploration for another day.

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