

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
FIG s	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

JOURNEYS OF BEING AND BECOMING ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS AT SU

Charmaine van der Merwe

1 Introduction

I want to be an Academic Developer one day.

Becoming an academic developer is probably more often a matter of chance rather than of choice (Fraser, 1999). Academic development as a field draws participants from various and often completely unrelated fields. Since there is no specific undergraduate study programme related to this field, I cannot imagine many, besides myself, expressing the sentiment in the introductory sentence to this chapter. Instead, most academic developers are probably more likely to agree with the statement by a colleague I interviewed for the study reported on in this chapter:

[...] saw a job here being advertised, and I thought about it. I thought I can't really understand what it is about, and what I will do, but it sounds really interesting, and at least it is in higher education. (C8)

Academic development is not easy to define as it may depend on many factors within a specific context (Leibowitz, 2014). A broad definition of academic development could be that it is "... about the creation of conditions supportive of teaching and learning" (Leibowitz, 2014:359). Our work is often referred to as the "academic development project", with a shift from individual work to having a more strategic focus (Clegg, 2009). Furthermore, changing practices seems to be at the core of what we do (McGrath, 2020; Timmermans, 2014). Every dimension of academic development work however seems to be fragmented (Harland & Staniforth, 2003), with various authors referring to different tensions within academic development work. These include the debates around the discipline we belong to (Bath & Smith, 2004), whether our work is academic work or not (Fraser & Ling, 2014; Harland & Staniforth, 2003), the research we should engage in (Clegg, 2009) and the middle or marginal positions we occupy between different parties in the institution, such as management and the academics we support (Hicks, 2005; Little & Green, 2012).

As a novice academic developer, I embarked on this study to acquire an understanding of how my colleagues navigate these tensions in their journeys of being and becoming academic developers to direct my own development, but also the development of our group of academic

developers to achieve our Centre's mission of becoming thought leaders in teaching and learning at Stellenbosch University. The research question I attempted to answer was: How do we become and grow as academic developers at Stellenbosch University? Additionally, I hoped to understand who and what we are as academic developers, what enables our growth journeys and what challenges are hampering our being and becoming.

2 What I did (methodology)

A qualitative research design was most suited for this study where the aim was to understand and interpret the meaning the participants make of their specific experiences (Cresswell, 2009). Using a phenomenological approach to describe the in-depth authentic experiences of a phenomenon (Denscombe, 2010; Daniel & Harland, 2018), seemed appropriate to understand how academic developers make sense of their being and becoming journeys. Ideally in phenomenological research, the researcher needs to take on the position of a 'stranger' to be able to see the experiences through the eyes of their participants (Denscombe, 2010), but since being an 'insider', even if just a newcomer, I have first-hand experience of the being and becoming of academic developers. I therefore could not distance myself from my own experiences as an academic developer during the study, adding an element of ethnography to my approach, which aligns with Daniel and Harland's (2018:37) advice that sometimes "a question can be addressed using a variety of approaches". Ethnography is usually employed to study a specific culture or group, and like Phenomenology, "tends to emphasize the importance of understanding things from the point of view of those involved" (Denscombe, 2010:80).

Since the focus was not on introspection but rather the analysis of a 'culture' to which I have 'natural access' as an active, permanent participant, on more or less equal terms with other participants, this study is leaning towards self-ethnography (Alvesson, 2003:174). Furthermore, this methodology is suitable when studying the culture within a department at a Higher Education Institution, where the researcher takes her personal experience and familiarity with the setting as the starting point and then, supported by the experiences of her colleagues, tries to develop a new understanding and perspective of the taken for granted culture (Alvesson, 2003).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven colleagues at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) during the first half of 2019. These included interviews with four colleagues who left the CTL during the previous year since their experiences could add to the richness of the data. Most interviews lasted around an hour, were guided by open-ended questions framed as an inquiry into being and becoming an academic developer at Stellenbosch University. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of study participants in a study like this is particularly difficult, since we know each other as colleagues (Madikizela-Madiya, 2017). An added layer of complexity with this study was that many of the study participants are authors of other chapters in this book. Throughout the text I refer to them as "colleagues" and used "C1, C2...", etc. when referring to what they have shared during the interviews.

All interviews were transcribed, and an interpretative approach was used to make sense of the data and create meaning of the stories, experiences and contexts of my colleagues (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). During data analysis my own self-ethnographic account of "what goes on out there" (Alvesson, 2003:188) in being and becoming as academic developer, is

intermingled with the individual narratives from my colleagues. The colleagues interviewed for this study were given the opportunity to read this chapter and indicate if any of their comments should not be published. Their comments are included verbatim in this chapter.

The focus will now first move to situating the study within the theory.

3 Situating the study within theory

In our own work as academic developers we often refer to a framework by Van Schalkwyk, Cilliers, Adendorff, Cattell and Herman (2013) to understand the 'being and becoming' journeys of academics, from being everyday reflective teachers to becoming 'Teaching Scholars'. Movement is facilitated by belonging to a community of practice (CoP), being in an enabling environment (EE) and the level of regard and reward (RR) within the institution (Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2013).

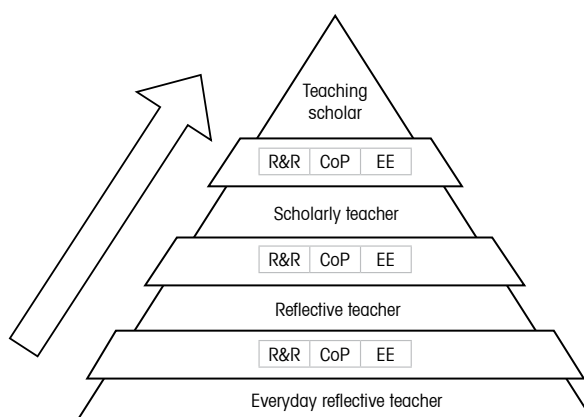


Figure 3.1 Explanatory Framework by Van Schalkwyk, et al. (2013)

In this study, I was interested to see if we as academic developers perhaps follow a similar journey and particularly how a CoP can be used to frame our being and becoming as scholars and academic developers. Using a CoP as theoretical framework for Higher Education research was found useful by Tight (2015). Although aspects of 'regard and reward' and the 'enabling environment' presented itself in the data, these were not the specific focus of this study.

Previously, Arthur (2016) used a CoP to describe the life history of one academic, first as a teacher in a department, then as an academic developer and subsequently as a scholar. When using CoP as a framework, learning to be and become happens as part of being and when participating in the CoP where learning is seen as situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning takes place as an integral part of participating in social practice. They further proposed 'Legitimate Peripheral Participation' as a framework to understand learning which could specifically be applied to understand how newcomers learn to become full participants in a specific CoP as they need to engage in activities that are authentic to the practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Quinlan, 2018).

In another publication Lave (1991:68) eloquently described this process of becoming a legitimate participant:

Newcomers become oldtimers through a social process of increasingly centripetal participation, which depends on legitimate access to ongoing community practice. Newcomers develop a changing understanding of practice over time from improvised opportunities to participate peripherally in ongoing activities of the community. Knowledgeable skill is encompassed in the process of assuming an identity as a practitioner, of becoming a full participant, an oldtimer. (Lave, 1991:68)

The knowledge and skills necessary to take on the identity and become an academic developer thus develop while participating in the work of academic developers, as participation in the CoP provides structure and understanding of the knowledge and skills (Lave, 1991). The CoP as the site of learning, is not just any community, but defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015:1). Wenger (1998:72) explained that a “community of practice should be viewed as a unit” and described three dimensions of a CoP – *mutual engagement*, a *joint enterprise* and a *shared repertoire*. Before newcomers to any CoP can fully participate, they have to master the repertoire, learn the rules of engagement and become familiar with the specific community’s viewpoint on the world (Adendorff, 2011).

In the sections below, the academic development journey as perceived by me and my colleagues, is described according to ‘the coming to’, ‘the being’ and ‘the becoming’ of academic developers and academic development.

4 Coming to academic development

At Stellenbosch University’s Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), we, the academic developers, are known as ‘Educational Advisors’. We all changed professions at some stage. I first wanted to become an academic developer years ago when I enrolled for the MPhil in Higher Education programme and met two academic developers from the CTL who taught on some of the modules. I was inspired by their knowledge on teaching and learning matters and I decided that I was going to change my career one day and become an academic developer (hence the quote at the start of the chapter). My first entry into academic development was to assist with workshops and short courses on teaching and learning on a part-time basis, while still teaching in my discipline. When I finally entered the formal world of academic development, I still had no clear idea of what academic development work entailed, similar to the response from a colleague interviewed for this study and included in the introduction of this chapter.

Since there is no academic pathway into academic development, entering the field happened by chance for some colleagues when they were at a crossroads in their previous careers. They expressed a sense of wanting to focus more on their passion for teaching and learning: *“I realised while working there, that I don’t think my passion is (previous discipline), it is education. ... I need something more... it was out of wanting a new challenge, but also realising that my future is probably going to be in education...”* (C2). Some joined the CTL, or its predecessor for involvement in specific projects, with their roles later evolving to incorporate more academic development -type work.

Similar to what Green and Little (2016) found when profiling more than a thousand academic developers from across the world (including South Africa), the largest percentage of academic developers migrate from professional fields, and often enter the field with a formal qualification in Education (Fraser, 1999). Five of the eleven colleagues interviewed for this study have an undergraduate background in Education, while the rest have degrees in a wide variety of disciplines, in the Humanities, Science, Health Sciences, and Theology. A background in Education however does not mean an easy transition into the world of academic development: *"It did not come naturally to me, the AD space. The agency that is required of us, that did not come naturally to me. So, it took more time for me, I think, than for others, to grow into it, because in the beginning I made the mistake of trying to compare it with the Basic Education space, which obviously are worlds apart"* (C3). Additionally, appointment into an academic development position did not mean entry into the field of academic development: *"... nothing here was familiar... I feel as if I've got no identity. I'm just absolutely nobody, and my experience in everything I have done ... it didn't count. Whoever I was before I started here played no role"* (C8 sharing how she felt when she arrived). Even after many years in academic development, other colleagues also shared this sentiment: *"...it was a long process for me to grow into that kind of identity. Which at this stage, I still have some uncertainty sometimes"* (C6).

At the point of being appointed as academic developers for the first time, we thus became legitimate peripheral participants. Personally, I experienced this as an empowering position where I now had access to the new CoP and the opportunity to develop an understanding of being an academic developer, but this is not always the case and can even be experienced as a disempowering position where one is kept at the outskirts and prevented from full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

5 Being academic developers

As already mentioned in the introduction, academic development work may be difficult to define, but part of being in a CoP means negotiating as a group what our "joint enterprise" is (Wenger, 1998). The joint enterprise is not static, but something that evolves through mutual engagement and constant negotiation and meaning making (Wenger, 1998). This resonates with how one of my colleagues described academic development work: *"... even though people sometimes refer to our field as a messy field, and it's not well defined, I think it needs to be that, because change is the only constant. ... For AD as the name says, 'development' that means that already, that implies that you are on an ever-changing journey. So, the fact that it's not well-defined and that we sometimes don't know what we're doing, and that we sometimes question what we are doing, I think it needs to be that because that puts you outside of your comfort, and that necessarily sends you in directions where you would not normally go into"* (C3).

Colleagues also shared some other ideas about what academic development work and being an academic developer at the CTL, entail: *"So the way I see AD is what you do, you work within a teaching and learning space, and all the activities that you engage in are focused on enhancing teaching and learning processes in various kinds of ways"* (C6). This could be at different levels within the institution, at different levels within a faculty, down to working with individuals *"...to pick up from the lecturer where they are, and to plan together a way forward..."* (C5). Since starting at the CTL, I learned that the preferred term we use is 'professional learning

of academics', instead of staff development, educational development, faculty development or professional development, due to the deficit connotation of the word 'development'. A focus on the academic as person is captured by another colleague saying: "...for me the big thing is developing a sense of belonging in a space" (C9), referring to how academics should develop their T&L identities and have access to "...the ways of thinking, seeing, behaving, meaning, doing, valuing of a space" (C9). This links to providing access for them to a T&L CoP and furthermore, providing this in a care-full environment (Herman, Bitzer & Leibowitz, 2018): "I think that's my role, is to support academics. ... if I think back on my own position as a lecturer, is that you often want to know somebody is in your corner, So it's the whole caring thing, is to build a relationship which shows that you care for academics, for lecturers" (C2).

My colleagues and I could provide extensive lists of the work we do, but I was cautioned by one colleague who stressed that we should not reduce our work to a list of things such as workshops and short courses on T&L: "...we do it, but if that becomes the definition of what we do, then I think we lose the potential to go about our work like academics" (C11). Another colleague said it is about "changing the way people think about T&L" (C10). Changing practices (McGrath, 2020) and changing the way people think about different aspects of T&L seems to be a common theme running through what we think we aim to do with our academic development work at the CTL. This is also identified as the main threshold concept in academic development work by Timmermans (2014).

The focus on change management implies taking on a leadership role (Taylor, 2005) in T&L at the institution: "...we should take our work forward in an academic way... be thought leaders... so that people know when they go and talk about teaching in the university, that these people at the centre (ADs at CTL) are experts, and that their expertise came about in the same way as other experts in the university achieved expertise, through hard studies, difficult questions, rigorous research..." (C11). Being thought leaders in the field of academic development will require us "...to be on the cutting edge of new knowledge within (our) particular field of discipline. It would also require for you to generate new knowledge within your field and using that to give direction to this field" (C6).

The work of academic developers has evolved over time, such as a focus on learning as opposed to teaching, but also becoming more theoretical, more scholarly, professional and context- or discipline-sensitive (Gibbs, 2013). Although many of my colleagues were almost hesitant to indicate that research was part of their roles, which aligns with the findings by Green & Little (2016), most of them were engaging in some kind of research, with eight of them holding PhDs and two currently engaged in doctoral studies. This hesitance to commit to a research role is possibly related to our institutional appointments as professional support staff and not academic staff. One question we often grapple with is how our ability to be thought leaders in T&L will be influenced if we are not engaged in research. Our institution is a research-intensive university, but it is sometimes perceived as if working in a research-led way does not seem necessary for those being responsible for the professional learning of academics in their teaching (Harland & Staniforth, 2003).

The SU Teaching and Learning Policy (SU, 2018) describes the progression of the teaching role, with a 'Leaderly Teaching Scholar' as the ultimate destination. 'Leaderly Teaching Scholars' are defined as individuals who "contribute to the body of T&L knowledge through publication, and provide leadership in the field of teaching practice institutionally, nationally and internationally" (SU, 2018: 5). As academic developers we facilitate this prospective growth journey for academic staff, but it is not clear how we should navigate our own growth according to this framework: *"if we are now trying to grow scholarly teachers, if we are not that, then how does that now look? You know, so we can't say you must embrace the scholarship of teaching and learning and we don't"* (C2). One colleague interviewed for this study, proposed a potential answer to this question when commenting that *"...we need to have a more visible and reliable research profile at the Centre, and for that we obviously need more time, a more focused approach to our research"* (C11). This then begs the question what the focus of such academic development research and scholarship should be?

6 Our discipline and scholarship

Although we as academic developers entered the world of academic development from different backgrounds and disciplines, we now belong to the disciplinary tribe of Higher Education studies (Bath & Smith, 2004). Contrary to much deliberation, Bath and Smith (2004:13) provide a compelling argument for Higher Education studies to be "in every respect a full-blown discipline". The movement into academic development from other disciplines requires academic developers to navigate their way into new ways of thinking and being. A colleague who entered academic development from an academic position (with a PhD from a home discipline), however, realised none of her academic qualifications and experiences prepared her, or gave her an automatic understanding of this new discipline: *"I tried to find out what this thing of scholarship of teaching and learning is beforehand, because I'd never heard the term before."* (C8). Another found it difficult to see the relevance of her PhD (in another discipline) to academic development work: *"I felt initially that I could not translate what I did in my PhD, I could not translate that to the field of academic development..."* (C3).

It thus seems as if we might have to engage in parallel scholarships as academic developers. Since we facilitate the learning of others (the academics we support), we also teach and collaborate with lecturers on their journeys, so we should engage in the Scholarship of Teaching (Boyer 1990). If we are to be thought leaders we should also engage in the Scholarship of Discovery into our discipline of higher education (Boyer, 1990; Bath & Smith, 2004; Clegg, 2009), and some may argue also the Scholarship of Academic Development (Geertsema, 2016). This certainly poses challenges for our identity as academic developers. Several of my colleagues expressed a discomfort with their identities when they started out as academic developers, one saying: *"It was a question of who am I now? I knew who I was when I was a (previous discipline), and you know, it's easy to explain if someone asks you what you're doing. I'm a (previous discipline), or I'm a lecturer, or I'm a (previous discipline) lecturer at Stellenbosch University. What am I now?"* (C4). After many years she cautiously sees herself as a scholar now: *"So when I think of myself at this point in time, which I'm not saying too loudly ... I'm a researcher now. I'm a researcher in the field of teaching and learning"* (C4). In her case she is engaging in both the Scholarship of Discovery into Higher Education, as well as collaborating with academics in the Scholarship of Teaching.

It is important to my colleagues to become scholars to enable them to do what they do as best as they can: *"I think what we want to be, we don't want to be administrators or bureaucrats... I think we want to be academics, meaning we want to go about growth and development and learning and knowledge in the same way as academics, in a structured, responsible and rigorous manner".* (C11). This is not just another argument for academic developers to be appointed in academic positions (Fraser & Ling, 2014), but rather a case for growing our professional credibility. This reminded me of several encounters with a senior academic in a leadership role at the institution who was very unappreciative of the work done by the CTL. The person always argued that someone from outside their discipline cannot tell them how to teach and assess in their discipline. Some of my colleagues shared similar experiences at the institution: *"... you are not seen as the scholar or the intellectual in the room. You do not have authority. You are a project manager, you need to get the outputs, but you don't have the agency to really change the course of the project"* (C7). These experiences raise the question as to whether this is because we are not seen as academics and not perceived as going about our work in a scholarly way? Or is the scholarship we engage in perhaps not appreciated by the academic community (Adendorff, 2011)? These are important questions for a new academic developer like me, since I need to know in which direction I have to engage for my own professional learning. It is also important for us as a community, since a lack of scholarliness could challenge our ability to take on a leadership role in T&L: *"I really think we have to create space for our own professional learning to enable us to also go out there and to talk with an authentic voice and be credible, and I don't want to say play the game, but meet lecturers where they are. So, if scholarship and research is important for them, then we must meet them there. We do different kinds of research, it doesn't matter, and our identity is not in there, but it just makes it, in a way, it opens up some kind of avenue if you can meet them and talk sort of the language that they are used to."* (C1). Showing academics that we have an understanding of the tension between teaching and research could potentially add to the authenticity of our own practice and engagement (Kinchin, Heron, Hosein, Lygo-Baker, Medland, Morley & Winstone, 2018).

At our research-intensive institution *"there's a scholarliness, there's an understanding for that notion of scholarliness. They don't always accept it, but at least they understand, there is a body of knowledge behind teaching and learning. It's not just something that anybody can do or do well"* (C10). Furthermore, the most recent external review of the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement of which the CTL forms part, promoted a shift towards scholarliness: *"It is, however, recommending that more is done formally to enable research and the scholarly status of research within the Division and thus to contribute to the intellectual growth and academic stature of individuals as well as of the Division as a whole."* (Czerniewicz, Boughey & Schaffner, 2017:7).

From this section it seems important that we develop and grow the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as well as our discipline of Higher Education to provide us with the credibility as leaders to bring about change in T&L. Linking back to the notion of a CoP, this might mean being part of more than one CoP (Bolander Laksov, 2019), but the experience gained from the one CoP could potentially strengthen participation in the other.

7 Becoming academic developers

This brings me back to my research question: How do we become and grow as academic developers at the CTL? Although some of us completed masters' degrees and even PhDs in Higher Education, generally academic developers do not pursue a formal qualification to prepare for the work in academic development. Quinn and Vorster (2014) suggest academic developers should develop their knowledge in a more systematic way through a formal qualification in academic development, but this is a relatively new post-graduate initiative and therefore most academic developers, and none of those interviewed for this research study, followed this route. Instead, growth and development mostly happened informally while being employed in an academic developer position. This strengthens the need for situated learning of ADs within a CoP.

Access to the practice and field of academic development (and the CoP) is however not automatic when appointed in an academic development position (Wenger, 1998) and some individuals find the transition really challenging. Initially one of my colleagues, referring to the broader academic development community, felt *"... they are just in a different world to yourself, just feeling I'm not fitting here. I don't talk their language, I don't know what they know, I don't have their background. For me for a long time and possibly still, I feel the lack of a PhD in this area as a barrier, because I feel I don't have a claim to fame in the area. I can't walk in and say look, here's the evidence that I am now a legitimate knower in this area. I'm always fighting for legitimacy for something"* (C4).

At Stellenbosch University, academic developers do not just have to engage and take responsibility for institution-wide academic development projects, but they also must navigate individual access to academic faculties, often in disciplines unfamiliar to them, as a result of a devolved model of working. Although the involvement in faculty work adds another layer of complexity to the being and becoming of academic developers at Stellenbosch University, it was not the specific focus of this study. It does however play an important role in the way colleagues described the realities of their being and becoming academic developers.

Some academic developers find it difficult to be part of the disciplinary communities in the respective faculties: *"The Faculty is a completely different culture again, on the other hand. I sort of got the feeling, you know, you've got to go in there but don't tread on toes. You can do this, but you can't do that, sort of being part of the Faculty, but not actually being part of the Faculty..."* (C5). The feeling of not belonging might be more relevant when academic developers were not previously linked to those faculties as academics or students: *"it was a big barrier, how to navigate a way into lecturers' spaces, without feeling like, almost like an intruder, that you are trying to step into a domain where you are not an expert"* (C6). When working in faculties we are often seen as outsiders or "visitors", operating on the periphery of the CoP, which may decrease our ability to influence the CoP (Bolander Laksov, 2019:376). Some academic developers however do have a disciplinary background related to the faculties where they are expected to do academic development work. For one colleague, being an academic developer in her previous home faculty affords her the opportunities to do academic development work because *"...they (lecturers) feel I can understand the language that they speak. They feel that I know how (discipline) works"* (C4). She further expands that her legitimacy in the faculty comes

from her background as an academic in the faculty. But another colleague, who “*understood curriculum, teaching and learning, (specific discipline) knowledge*” (C9), still found it difficult: “*It took me about two years to get the Faculty to turn around a bit*” (C9).

Another colleague contemplated whether the reason for the slow processes of change in the faculties could perhaps be ascribed to a lack of understanding about what we as academic developers and the CTL do: “*People don’t know what your role really is. They have no idea what you actually do*” (C7). Or is this perhaps a lack of credibility and access, as entering any CoP starts with peripheral access before earning “rite of passage” as one of my colleagues noted: “*I think, very often I felt that lecturers are okay with you helping or supporting them in certain things that they feel that’s something you can do. Like provide me with a letter, provide me with the tips... but questioning their own philosophies around teaching and learning, questioning their practices in terms of how they go about their pedagogy in terms of how they go about teaching their disciplines. There I sometimes felt some of them felt like you had, you know, you didn’t have the rite of passage to engage with them on that level, because if you do not have a PhD in (the academic’s discipline), you cannot come and tell me how to teach (the discipline)*” (C6).

This notion of ‘rite of passage’ is similar to Morrow’s ‘epistemological access’ where it is not merely physical access, but “learning how to become a successful participant in an academic practice” (Morrow, 2009:78). Being appointed as an academic developer therefore does not automatically mean access to practice as an academic developer, as this access cannot be given to you as part of a position, it is dependent on what you yourself do (Morrow, 2009). In Morrow’s work on epistemological access the teacher plays a role in providing the circumstances and environment for students to gain epistemological access to the disciplines. Similarly, academic developers help academics to gain epistemological access to the practice and scholarship of teaching and learning. This leaves me with questions such as who supports us as academic developers and how do we gain access to the practice and field of academic development and to the community of Higher Education? In addition, how do we gain access to the discipline or the faculty where we have been appointed to support and do our academic development work, because as newcomers we can learn from experienced academic developers as peripheral participants when engaging with institutional and central academic development activities, but this is not necessarily the case with our academic development work in the different and unique faculties.

In this study, learning to ‘become’ academic developers was often enabled by specific individuals within the CTL who “*opened the door*” (C4) for others into the world of academic development. These individuals sometimes helped to make new academic developers feel included: “*I think (person)’s faith in me, that she always left or opened up a space for (me) to be (me), and to bring (my) part to the CTL. She drew me into things. You know, she was a very collaborative type of person, and I think for my start here, that was good, because it built my confidence*” (C5). These individuals form the basis of the CoP to which we want to be legitimate participants, but they are also enablers of growth, highlighting their value for the professional learning of academics as well as for academic developers (Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2013).

This links to Lave and Wenger's (1991) proposal of a CoP where academic developers can learn from each other, especially from the more experienced 'old timers' and allow for enculturation into academic development work, such as learning about theories and research: "...he would explain to me that our field is underpinned by sociology and psychology... so that was the one thing that opened up the world to me..." (C4). The academic development CoP therefore seems enabling both for access to the work of academic development, but also to grow towards the scholarship(s) necessary to participate.

Linking back to the framework by Van Schalkwyk, et al. (2013), there is evidence that much of our work relates to being reflective practitioners. Everyone seems to agree that *"you have got to do your own reading. You've really got to go into the literature and understand what is the scholarlyness behind what you are doing"* (C10). And then being reflective, not just about teaching and learning, but the practice of academic development. *"We must be reflective practitioners about our own work"* (C1). Furthermore, we need to have discussions about T&L issues, because *"...if we don't have time to talk about these things and grapple with them... then what will we say when we're outside (of the CTL, in the faculties)"* (C1). This seems to be a continuous self-directed process. *"I don't think it ever stops. You just continue along the journey, but you begin to understand more and more as you go along"*. (C10).

There are however some concerns that this self-development remains mainly superficial as limited time and space are available or created to engage at a deeper level. Very often the reading is just to keep you ahead for the next thing you are involved with. Sometimes this isn't even the case: *"I mean, you can say something where you think, your gut sort of points you in this direction. So, I think a big challenge for me is the fact that you very often feel I'm supposed to be the expert, but I'm not, because there are just so many things in our field that you are supposed to be an expert on. But you can't be because if you have to do your day job, all the projects, get that going, then it leaves very little time for actually reading up"* (C2). Additionally, we are not doing this as a collective, *"...people don't have enough of those conversations as ADs... we aren't sitting together and talking enough together about what informs our thinking. We aren't reading together. We aren't having those discussions because we're too busy working, doing what we need to do...putting out fires and running from the one intervention to the next one, get it done, now we're busy with the next thing."* (C10). There seems to be limited mutual engagement, which is an important dimension of learning and participating in a CoP. Furthermore, the CoP is not growing as it should because it seems as if some newcomers may not become old timers (Lave & Wenger, 1991): *"I don't think there is enough of this, call it succession planning is maybe not the right word, but you know what I mean? Growing the field, bringing younger people into the field... I haven't seen much of it happening...I don't think enough time is spent on developing them and their thinking, and the thinking that needs to inform their work"* (C10).

Many colleagues noted a lack of time to acquire in-depth knowledge. Due to the individual nature of working in the devolved model, colleagues felt it was expected of them to be experts on all things teaching and learning. As a new advisor this is extremely distressing, having to know everything about everything. Even the more senior colleagues in the CTL expressed their frustration and experiencing their own theoretical underpinning to be "thin" resulting in a feeling of insufficient depth to their work: *"... and I always felt like a fraud. I knew the little bit... but I*

know for myself I've got nothing underlying what I am saying. There is nothing" (C8). Another colleague agrees with this: "I always felt that I didn't know enough about this thing in order to really speak with confidence to lecturers..." (C6). The suggestion from this colleague is to find one thing that you could be an expert in and then use this to make connections to other T&L aspects. At this point I was wondering if a PhD would potentially assist in finding this 'one thing' and providing depth to my work as an academic developer.

As mentioned before, most colleagues already hold a PhD or are pursuing one. There were however different opinions on the value of having a doctorate for our work as academic developers. For one participant, engaging in doctoral studies allowed her to relate to academics: *"I think in our environment, to hold your own, for some or other reason...it's not about your knowledge, I think. But I think it's about understanding what lecturers are going through..." (C7). For another participant, it strengthened her own theoretical understanding of our work, but also informed the CTL's work: "I started with the PhD... So I thought you know, it would really be good to start theorising and thinking about my work in a different way, because I'm a pragmatist, a practice based person, and then I realised that there was a bit of a gap in my knowledge. I realised the only way of doing it is to really do formal studies. I would like to say that it really developed myself, and then also informed what I do and maybe more how I do it. It also filtered through to the Centre for Teaching and Learning, some of the ways we approach things and how we do things etc." (C1). Furthermore the PhD studies created an appreciation for the body of knowledge that underpins our work and thereby giving another colleague the ability to engage with confidence: "...as I went through that process, and reading up on a lot of things, and understanding things better, and understanding the field of higher education better, and coming to that point where you actually feel confident that the field of higher education is a discipline, or can be regarded as a discipline, because it has its own body of knowledge. There is a lot of reputable research about it. So we can actually stand our ground in terms of being academic when it comes to the field of higher education. So that, having developed that kind of awareness has helped me to become more confident in terms of speaking to academics, whatever field they are in." (C6). And then of course, the PhD affords status: "The other thing a PhD does is it gives you status at the university, especially a university like Stellenbosch... They look at you with even more respect...it's the currency of academia..." (C10). This is definitely true for a PhD in your discipline: "I have the privilege of being seen by (previous discipline) as a legitimate knower in the (disciplinary) field. The PhD in (previous discipline), even though I've not worked in the field, has that currency, or capital, cultural capital linked to it". (C4)*

But, this same colleague believes a PhD in Higher Education will give her even greater credibility: *"...if I really want to do this work, we want to do this work well, we've got to meet the (lecturers) where they are. So, if my (lecturers) are experts in their field and they've got PhDs, I really, actually need to go in with the same expertise in this field that they have in their field, not with my PhD in (previous discipline), the same expertise in teaching and learning. That's when we can start to talk" (C4). She feels like an imposter without it and still feels her legitimacy in academic development "will come from being a legitimate researcher in the field" (C4). The sentiment from this colleague aligns with Clegg (2009) who reported that truly understanding the theories underpinning academic development will allow us to defend our work and strengthen the contribution we make.*

Although there is support for colleagues to complete a formal qualification such as a PhD, those who entered the academic development space with already completed PhDs felt less empowered to prioritise time for research, since there is no formal research requirement for those in academic development: *"So what happens is I go sort of with my hat in my hand each time and say can I have (research leave), and I feel a little bit guilty for asking for it, because there is so much else to do. You know, can I have some research leave, and then I put myself under incredible pressure. I'm not allowed to read, I just have to write, because I must submit something by the end of the time".* (C4). Again, this could potentially relate back to the formal designation of our roles as professional support staff (Green & Little, 2016).

From the interview data it seems important to grow our own scholarship, and although the institutional environment is perceived as not being care-full towards academic developers (Herman et al., 2018), the CoP within the CTL provides a space to grow and thrive as academic developers. Although some parts of our work are done individually, there is a sense of a CoP amongst academic developers: *"This is a communal project, becoming an academic developer"* (C4), and *"we take more responsibility for one another, and more responsibility for one another's growth"* (C4). Within the CTL *"I think there is a feeling of camaraderie among support staff...and being treated like part of the team"* (C7). As a collective we should thus draw on each other as there is a sense that we should assist each other growing into our roles as academic developers.

When I asked colleagues for advice on how to grow, the response was that I should take more agency: *"...find someone you can talk to, someone you can run questions through, brainstorm with, ask if you are interested in research where to start... what's on what's not"* (C4). The advice given about navigating my work in the faculty was to understand that the resistance from some faculty members may be due to *"...fear...it's fear of the unknown...it's fear of change... it's just that very natural fear of oh my word, this is an entirely different space. I don't know anything that's going on here... and you need to learn to manage other people's fears."* (C9). Suggestions about going about facilitating academic development work in a faculty included the following: *"You go in gently. Don't go in with big boots and I know it all. Go in gently. Understand where they are coming from. They know their discipline better than you do. You know teaching and learning... So, there is a conversation that needs to happen... a mutual respect for what they know and what you know... it's a stepping forward and a stepping back"* (C10). Working within faculties seems to be enabled when you can assert your expertise in T&L (the scholarship), but in a gentle, care-full way, when you acknowledge the expertise of the academics you are working with. We need to create spaces within these faculty CoP groups where dialogue and collaboration around T&L theory (scholarship) and T&L practice can happen (Bolander Laksov, 2019).

To enable this engagement, we seem to navigate this space by building relationships... *"I think it's where the relationships were built over time. I think that's where we flourish in the work that we do"* and later *"I don't think there is any point in having all the knowledge and everything, but you cannot build the relationships in a Faculty and get in there and you know, realise what the struggles are and what lecturers want to talk about..."* (C2). And also by meeting lecturers where they are: *"I never came at them with AD discourse. I come at them with what can I do to help you? What is your context? What are you doing, and what do you need right now? Starting*

where they are, that's a gaining trust thing..." (C9). So, in order to facilitate change or have an influence in a faculty it seems *"you kind of first have to be in there and understand what they are doing, and be part of what they are doing... you live with them, you walk with them every day"* (C10). We should see ourselves as partners and not support staff, like a colleague puts it: *"...over the years it has now changed to partnering, because I don't feel that people need crutches, the academics. So, you need honesty ... you asked for me to partner with you on something, there is knowledge that I have and knowledge that you have, and we put that together, like partners"* (C5). For another colleague it was important that *"...they (lecturers) saw me as a resource and somebody that made them feel supported and safe... your role as a solution, not a compliance office, but rather somebody coming in and practically helping them"* (C7). Making these differences often happens through *"working in the cracks"*, doing a lot of *"invisible work"* (C10), thus operating within the 'third space' (Whitchurch, 2015).

8 Conclusion

Coming to the end of this study, I return to the research question: How do we become and grow as academic developers at Stellenbosch University? Using CoP as a lens to analyse our experiences of being and becoming academic developers, I firstly acknowledge that being part of, and learning as a legitimate participant in a CoP is indeed a useful way to frame our being and becoming journeys. There are however multiple CoPs, each with their own set of criteria for access and engagement and various tensions adding to the complexity of the journeys.

I found a CoP of academic development colleagues within the CTL, sharing a passion for the professional learning of lecturers, constantly trying to do it better through reflecting on what we do as a group (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015:1). Gaining access to this CoP is facilitated by opportunities to engage in discussions, but I have learned that access cannot be given to a newcomer as part of a position only, it is also dependent on what you yourself do (Morrow, 2009). Becoming an academic developer does require a CoP but also individual agency to join the CoP and draw from its strengths while also adding to it. Mutual engagement in this CoP then acts as an enabler to gain access to academic development theory and practice.

Access to an understanding of academic development theory will require time and opportunities to engage on a deep level with various scholarships, such as Teaching and Learning, Discovery (in Higher Education) and Academic Development, so that we can master the repertoire, learn the rules of engagement and become familiar with our community's viewpoint on the world (Adendorff, 2011). This is needed if we as academic developers want to be in a position to change teaching and learning practices in the institution. To facilitate our vision of being thought leaders in the institution, we need to take on the challenge of growing our discipline and scholarship and we need a care-full environment to flourish, not just for the newcomers but also the old-timers.

At our institution, the expectation of academic developers to simultaneously be responsible for an academic faculty as well as be involved in central work for the institution creates an additional tension which hampers the identity formation of newcomer academic developers. Legitimate access

to the T&L CoP in faculties is much more difficult and seems to be enabled when relationships exist where you can assert your expertise in T&L in a gentle, care-full way, while also acknowledging the expertise of the academics you are working with.

After this study my advice to newcomers will be to actively pursue opportunities to become part of CoPs and engage with old-timers on the theory and practice of academic development as often as possible. I wish I understood the benefit of the CoP when I started with this study, since the process (journey) would have been so much more fulfilling. If I collaborated with colleagues, especially more experienced 'old-timers', not just as interview participants but as co-researchers, it may have taken less time for me to feel that I was indeed a legitimate participant in this CoP of academic developers.

At this point I can say "I both am and continue to become an academic developer".

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