

Shape shifting in higher education: Contrasting conceptions of academics, their development and the roles academic developers play

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Key words

Academic development, educational development, professional development, leadership

Abstract

This paper presents a conceptual framework for considering approaches to enhancing learning and teaching through academic development initiatives. This paper identifies conceptions of the university academic which are associated with contrasting research literatures and fundamentally different approaches to academic development. Five lenses or conceptions are offered in all: academic as student, academic as professional practitioner, academic as employee, academic as citizen and, finally, academic as innovator or intrapreneur. We highlight the issues and utility of each conception and describe the implications of each. We suggest that the framework offers a means of understanding and identifying theoretical underpinning for what can appear to be a confusing, eclectic, and contradictory field.

1.0 Introduction

Academic development is largely about improving the teaching and learning of students (Boud and Brew, 2013). Shifts in the nature and size of our student body, the pressures placed upon universities by government and funding regimes, the availability of technologies and our growing pedagogical understanding are changing the learning and teaching landscape (Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2007). As a consequence academic practice has become more complex (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2015) and so academic development more important (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001).

To further complicate matters, while academic development is invariably about improving learning and teaching, what improvement is deemed desirable, how it should be brought about, who should effect it and how it should be monitored are all available for debate (Napoli et al., 2010). Equally, the theory and research which would inform such debate can be curiously absent, assumed or unsaid (Krause, 2012; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2015). Gibbs (2013) notes the diversity in activity, philosophy and purpose that is subsumed under the terms academic and educational development. Saroyan and Trigwell (2015), similarly, note the range of vocabularies, goals, theories and methodologies in academic development and its evaluation. These are not the characteristics of a well-established profession or discipline. Boud and Brew (2013) concur, suggesting that academic development is often a pragmatic enterprise rather than one with a robust evidence base.

Diversity and eclecticism are perhaps inevitable given that: the notion of academic practice is itself fragmented (Green and Little, 2013); that most academic developers are migrants from other disciplines (Manathunga, 2007) and that there is no systematic way of thinking or accepted framework for recognising academic development expertise (Quinn and Vorster, 2014).

As a response to this lack of cohesion, this paper presents a preliminary conceptual framework for considering academic development initiatives. The framework is tentative and was developed in an effort to inform faculty-wide strategic interventions in a New Zealand

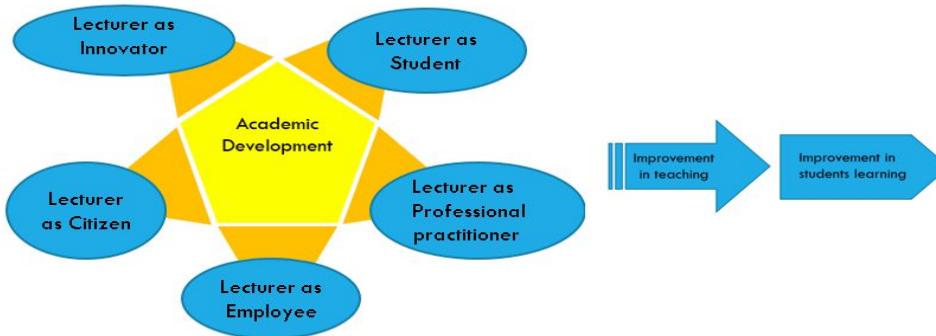
University. It has proved to be a useful tool in shaping and scoping academic development work, interpreting failures (of which there were many) and successes (of which there were a few), identifying relevant scholarly literatures and in designing pertinent research projects.

The framework's starting point is the perspective taken to academics.. We relate this to the nature of teaching practice development and the role of the academic developer. We consider in turn academics as: students and teaching as something to be taught and learnt, as a professionals who develop their practice within the workplace, as employees whose performance is managed and led, as culturally bound citizens and as educational innovators or intrapreneurs initiating new practices.

2.0 The framework and its 5 lenses

Each of the five lenses is described below and an effort is made to identify the practices, roles and relationships implied by each lens. Informing literatures are outlined together with a brief consideration of the issues and the utility of each approach. Although each conception is described separately, we would suggest that it is only by engaging with the potential and pitfalls of each that academic developers can hope to influence learning and teaching in a sustainable way and throughout their institutions. Figure 1 attempts to portray this conception of alternative lenses.

Figure 1. Academic development lenses



3.0 Academic as student

The traditional approach to professional development, including academic development, is the provision of workshops, courses or events for new and experienced staff (Gibbs, 2013). Staff attend classes as students and learn in environments using content and concepts shaped and selected by an academic developer. In these situations the academic developer is in some sense expert, knowing or privileged and the lecturer is to some extent lesser in terms of knowledge and expertise. 'Students' learn away from their work context and are taught and assessed by people who do not necessarily do the job they are teaching others to do (Boud and Brew, 2013).

Such development activities are probably evident in all universities. Many universities offer academics who are new to teaching credit courses in tertiary teaching which sometimes last as long as two years (Knapper, 2016). In offering lengthy and sometimes compulsory induction programmes universities may have properly identified novice and junior staff as being likely to benefit from course-based teaching (Matthews et al., 2014). Novices, new to an institution are also less likely to be in a position to resist requests to attend courses. They may be more motivated, anxious to improve and less burdened by competing responsibilities. On the other hand, senior tenured staff with years of experience, may be unwilling to adopt the role of

student even though their need for development may be well recognised (by others, if not by themselves!). For these colleagues and for some novices different interpretations and approaches to academic development may be more impactful (Trowler and Cooper, 2002). It is difficult for teaching staff to devote time to lengthy professional development courses and they sometimes call for short events and for tips and tricks (Kensington-Miller et al., 2012). Universities oblige and provide short workshops and events disseminating information about learning and teaching. Even then engagement may be patchy with the familiar enthusiasts being most likely to attend (Quinn, 2012).

If we take the perspective of academics as students of academic practice then questions arises not only over who attends but also over what needs to be learnt and how it should be taught. The literatures on university learning and teaching (Biggs, 1996; Ramsden, 2003) and less proximally, adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) are likely to inform academic developers' practices. The key concepts delivered have been identified as: reflective practice, assessment-driven learning, approaches to learning, constructive alignment, scholarship of teaching and learning (Kandlbinder and Peseta, 2009). Academic developers typically adopt active and experiential approaches in their teaching, being participatory, providing opportunities to receive and give feedback, work in partnership and undertake meaningful tasks (Knapper, 2016). They model the good practices in teaching that they strive to develop in others but often the impact of their programmes is uncertain (Chalmers and Gardiner, 2015; Grunefeld et al., 2015).

4.0 Academic as a practicing professional

It may be more appropriate to regard academics as professional practitioners rather than students. Professionals are thought of as: having a robust professional identity, being expert practitioners within their disciplines and capable of self-assessing and managing their own learning, which often occurs informally through engagement with people and places encountered at work (Fenwick et al., 2012; Jenkins, 2014). Learning derives from practice. It is socially situated (Boud & Brew, 2013) and is shaped by and shapes individuals' evolving professional identities (Nevgi and Löfström, 2015).

The view of academics as professional practitioners goes hand-in-hand with the notion of academic development units as providing support for practice development within professional communities. Such a conception is consistent with academic development units as facilitators, as supportive of lecturer-led initiatives, as critical friends, stimulating and contributing to communities of practice and as building and contributing to communication fora. Academic developers are responsive rather than proactive, service providers rather than teachers and do not necessarily work from a position of authority or privilege. Such an interpretation has been explored by Saroyan and Trigwell (2015) and by Boud and Brewster (2013). It avoids the deficit connotations and differential status implied by the academic as student lens (Boud and Brewster, 2013). Additionally, professional and practice based learning recognises that knowledge is situated in contexts (Opfer and Pedder, 2011) and so it embraces the discipline specific nature of some teaching (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2015).

Positioning learning as being shaped by professional identity and as occurring within professional practice, has distinct strengths (Handley et al., 2006). It integrates thinking, doing, people and situation. The problems associated with the relevance and transferability of course-based learning dissipate. Learning is occurring in practice, it is therefore, relevant to an individual's role and there are few transfer issues as new practices are developed and deployed within the context of practice. It also embraces the whole person, their emotions and values as

well as their concepts and skills (Jenkins, 2014). Boud and Brewster (2013) argue that academic developers should better utilise the opportunities for learning that the workplace affords. They also advocate for enhanced peer-to-peer learning and a 'curriculum' shaped by the role and challenges rather than one defined by academic developers or their institutions.

From a research perspective the concept of professional identity is a powerful one and has been used in a range of disciplines to explain, differential behaviours and causal relationships. Professional identity it is argued, will shape how a new idea is understood, the priority it is afforded and the emotional and professional responses stimulated. New ideas will be adopted to the extent they are perceived to align with and further professional identity. The concept of professional identity, provides a theoretical basis for interpreting reactions to change and the outcomes of interventions (Geertshuis and Liu, 2016). However, it has not, as yet, been extensively used to explore, design or evaluate practice-based academic development (Nevgi and Löfström, 2015) (although, of course, the development of professional identity is an objective of some courses).

The challenges of working within the professional practitioner lens lie in the imperative for improvement. Triggers for development are proposed to arise from the working environment through the professional. If they do not then there is no need, in the mind of the professional, for a change in practice. Similarly, triggers even if appreciated can be ignored. The effort entailed in developing professional identity is substantial. It requires extensive emotional and cognitive investment over a protracted period of time (Kelchtermans, 2009). As such it is not likely to be effective in reaching staff who do not prioritise teaching or who are satisfied with their current practices.

5.0 Academic as employee

Academics are, of course, employees of large institutions and as such exist within a hierarchy and so comply, to some extent, with the policies and processes developed by their university.

Leaders of institutions, educational and otherwise, develop strategies, consult with staff and implement measures designed to foster alignment and improve effectiveness. Universities now have senior staff and strategic plans that include commitments to addressing issues in learning and teaching. Universities are appointing vice-chancellors and pro-vice chancellors and charging them with the job of transforming learning. McInnis, Ramsden and Maconachie (2012) list five tasks for leaders of learning and teaching: shaping the strategic vision, inspiring and enabling excellence, devolving leadership of learning and teaching, rewarding recognising and developing teaching, and involving students as active partners. Policies, processes, monitoring and reporting can all be aligned to support implementation of university-wide strategies. Such measures are recognised as effective ways to support staff, remove unnecessary barriers, to facilitate change and to focus attention on important strategic or operational issues (Gibbs, 2013).

Employees are not only led, they are also managed, their performance is evaluated and possibly rewarded. Decisions are taken by senior staff that juniors are expected to abide by and change is implemented and managed. With regards to learning and teaching interventions designed to lift performance, these might include: annual performance reviews, course review templates that include predetermined criteria and centrally controlled summative courses evaluations.

The literature on leadership and management is vast and relevant. The emphasis is on performance and human resource development rather than learning. When it occurs, learning may be regarded as an organisational phenomenon rather than as something that exists within

an individual or is derived directly from practice (Argote, 2012). Theories of change management and institutional development offer insights into why our initiatives fail and how academic development might be more effective. Bamber and Stefani (2015) note how our theories of change are often unsaid and call for robust frameworks to guide the planning and evaluation of academic development interventions.

While recognising that academics are employees who are led and managed, the place of the academic developer in this hierarchical arrangement remains uncertain. Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) identified that the role of academic developers included taking a strategic approach to improving both educational processes and the practice of educators. Krausse (2012) proposes that academic developers, armed with an authority derived from access to data and evidence, can serve as change agents by advocating for shifts in practices that align with universities strategies. There are tensions however over where academic developers sit: are they leaders and managers, are they there to advise leadership, to serve bravely to say the unsayable on behalf of teaching staff, or do they live on the margins (Di Napoli and Clement, 2014; Stefani, 2015)?

In aligning with management, attempting to wield authority or excessive influence an academic developer is on dangerous ground. The use of levers, leaders and edicts may be resented and labelled as managerialism (Davies, 2015; Di Napoli and Clement, 2014) and targets and KPIs as performity (Ball, 2003; Carnell, 2007; Dent and Whitehead, 2013). Centrally determined and instrumental actions run counter to academics' desires for autonomy and the belief that the disciplines know best how to teach their own subjects (Krause, 2014). However, not to utilise the tools and techniques of management and institutional development is an option that few institutions are likely to take. Without strong values-based leadership and supportive management structures it is difficult to see how large institutions can respond in a coordinated fashion to the increasing demands for learning and teaching that is impactful, efficient, sustainable and formative.

6.0 Academic as citizen

So far we have considered the academic as a student, a professional practitioners and as an employee. Academics can also be regarded as citizens of academic departments.

Newcomers to any workplace grouping, including an academic department, are rapidly exposed to and influenced by its character or microculture (Schein, 2006). Once enculturated citizens will generally adopt the norms, practices and values of their group and be unable and unwilling to receive messages that run counter to cultural beliefs (Trowler, 2008). Group norms will determine, how individuals behave, what members talk about, prioritise and invest emotion in (Roxå and Mårtensson, 2015).

Lindblom-Ylännne et al. (2006) show that teachers adapt to cultural context and in one context may adopt a teaching centred approach and in another a learning centred approach. Cultures also shape the priority afforded teaching by individuals (Mårtensson and Roxå, 2016). This is not to imply that some university sub cultures do not value good teaching, only that they differ in what is perceived to be good teaching, how it is recognised, who should do it, how it should be done and what priority and resources it should be afforded (Krause, 2014).

Regarding academics as culturally bound citizens suggests a number of challenges and opportunities for academic development initiatives (Leibowitz et al., 2015). Within universities' largely collegial sub-cultures, Roxå and Mårtensson (2015) identify trust, responsibility and progressiveness as three dimensions that characterise and differentiate micro-cultures. They suggest that academic developers can profitably analyse the cultural context of groups they

work with to attune their approach. Appreciating a microculture's history and, in particular, the dominant discourses and stories around teaching and learning, can provide insight into the vocabularies, values and criteria of a group (Fullan and Scott, 2009). This provides academic developers with the ability to shape communications and initiatives so they are recognised as relevant to the ambitions of the discipline and so, improve their likelihood of gaining traction in supporting citizens on their own terms, in their own environment (Green and Little, 2013).

Academic developers are likely to be regarded as outsiders or marginal but Mårtensson et al (2014) notes that disciplines do welcome outsiders provided it is on their own terms. They and others note that such collaborations born out of collegiality are effective in leading to incremental changes but ineffective in stimulating radical change (Burnes et al., 2014). That is, disruptive influences it seems are likely to originate from outside an academic department (Knapper, 2016). Paradoxically, in describing decision making, faculty rarely point to university leadership and, instead, identify internal factors and colleagues as instrumental in decision making (Mårtensson et al., 2014). It seems that while the imperative for radical change must be external, the decision to respond to the imperative must be understood as and seen to be internal (Trowler, 2008).

While collegiality is something academics purport to value in its own right, the way it is understood is sometimes inconsistent and unproblematised, this can lead to inconsistent thinking and action (Kligyte and Barrie, 2014). Quinn (2012) notes the disparity between the ideal and the actuality of collegial decision making and support. Krause (2014) goes to the lengths of arguing that despite strong expressed disciplinary allegiances, from a teaching perspective academics may be better characterised as independent nomads rather than as tribal members. Kligyte and Barrie (2014) suggest that at times the issues of sub-cultures and collegiality could be raised explicitly by leadership teams or academic developers. This gives citizens the opportunity to broaden their perspectives and, perhaps, reflect on contradictions.

7.0 Lecturer as innovator and intrapreneur

Within the field of innovation and entrepreneurship there is growing recognition that the people who are closest to the work of a business and to its customers have access to information that those in leadership positions or dedicated research and development units do not. Some of these individuals are driven to turn this information into good ideas and bring about innovations that contribute to the business' overall effectiveness. Such people have been described as intrapreneurs.

The innovation literature suggests that intrapreneurs can often be limited by their absence of organizational power and are sometimes forced to operate covertly when perceived to be working against the political status quo (Dovey and McCabe, 2014; Dovey and Rembach, 2015; Fosfuri and Rønde, 2009). These studies also show how innovators can be stigmatized as trouble-makers and marginalized when their ideas do not align with institutional strategy (Dovey, Green & McQueen, 2001) and driven to look for employment in competing institutions when stifled or blocked by organizational bureaucracy (Dovey and McCabe, 2014; Quinn, 1985). Willmott and Wall (2012) emphasize that the value of intrapreneurs resides in their ability to engage in serial innovations as a means to take advantage of opportunities and address challenges within the environment. Dovey and Rembach (2015) argue that intrapreneurs contribute significantly to the sustainability of an organization by nurturing and developing ideas and new valuable practices, products and/or services.

Pinchot also identifies a second kind of intrapreneur that he says he has underestimated in his original conception; these are the individuals who work as part of a team to support

intrapreneurial activity (Pinchot, 1986). This offers an additional role for academic development staff, one that involves working with cutting edge practice and with a university's most talented staff. Understanding the behaviours of and challenges facing innovators within the teaching and learning domain is important if academic developers are to play a role in recognizing and supporting innovative activity. Smith and Tushman, (2005) notes the complexity, contradictions and paradoxes inherent in supporting innovators.

The literature on intrapreneurship in the university teaching and learning domain is scant and fragmented. Existing studies tend to focus on entrepreneurial behaviours of university staff in relation to research commercialisation, external research funding, university-industry research collaborations and other revenue-generating activity rather than to teaching and learning. There is little acknowledgement that entrepreneurial behaviours can be applied to teaching and learning and that intrapreneurial agents can be found (and are increasingly sought after) in this domain. Intrapreneurship is typically juxtaposed in conversations with scholarship or with heightened research productivity and has even been regarded as incompatible with quality institutional teaching and learning (Lee and Rhoads, 2004). There are very few case studies of intrapreneurs and intrapreneurial activity in teaching and learning. The ones that can be found confirm both the relevance of the wider literature to the learning and teaching context and the critical role innovators can play (Schmid and Lauer, 2016).

Preliminary investigations by the authors, based on interviews with a small number of institutional leaders and intrapreneurs suggests that: intrapreneurs in learning and teaching can be readily identified. They have a substantial impact on learning and teaching at a departmental level, they receive little formal support and at least in the early days their ideas gain traction despite not because of management support, what support they get tends to be informal and finally they tend not to engage with disproportionate enthusiasm in applying for awards and grants that are designed to stimulate innovation. If intrapreneurs are the way forward then at present we do not know how to nurture them but academic developers could, by drawing on existing literature, advise universities on how not to get in their way. We suggest that further research into the ways universities can stimulate and capture intrapreneurial activity is necessary.

8.0 Discussion

The conceptual framework presented here provides a structure and theoretical basis to academic development which has been notably absent (Carew et al., 2008). Five lenses have been offered: Each lens regards the academic in a particular way and this, it is argued, has implications for the academic developer, their relationship to academics, the activities they engage in and the challenges they face in their roles. The academic development activities associated with each lens generate their own vocabulary and practices, imply a theoretical basis and the nature of any evaluative exercise or quality assurance. We have taken the lens on the lecturer as our starting point without the intention of proposing any direct causality. We could, equally, have started with the developer, the activity or the discipline. Our proposal is that within each lens there are necessary associations between perspectives, activities and issues but no unique causal paths.

The perspectives, activities and issues have been described above and are summarised in Table 1

Table 1. A summary of the lenses and their implications

Academic developer as:	Power	Lecturer as:	Development instruments and activity:	Issues:	Locus of development	Key concept	Core Discipline:
Teacher	>	Student	Courses - relevant, taught well	Impact on lecturers and students; course quality; attendance and reach; the curriculum, qualifications	Individual lecturer develops knowledge and skills.	Learning	Education
Leader or manager	>	Employee	Strategies, policies, procedures, change management techniques	Managerialism, resistance, performance, alignment, leadership, strategy, buy-in, performance, quality management and enhancement	Employees' performance is enhanced because they are supported, monitored and enabled	Performance	Management
Support (technical advisor, coach, consultant)	=	Professional practitioner	Coaching, mentoring, service provision, critical friend	Professional identity, Practice based learning, reach	Practitioners experience challenges in their places of work which they strive to resolve	Professional practice	Sociology
Outsider (coloniser, missionary, politician)	<	Insider (citizen, native, member)	Persuasion, politicking, infiltration, evangelising	Culture, norms, group processes, disciplines, collegiality, marginalisation.	Micro-culture shifts or change is translated and absorbed.	Culture	Anthropology & Psychology
Facilitator	?	Innovator and intrapreneur	Resource provision, stimulation and support to pockets of	Opportunity recognition, safe environment, able to fall forward, mainstreaming,	New practices developed in situ, implemented and assessed by expert innovators	Innovation	Innovation and entrepreneurship

This is not the first attempt to categorise the roles, strategies and approaches of academic development. Kennedy (2005) considering teacher development identified nine models or roles as follows: training, awards/certification, deficit, cascade, standards-based, coaching/mentoring, community of practice, action research and transformative. Most of these roles are captured in the table and nest under developer as teacher or support. Land (2001) reports 12 orientations to academic development and describes their fit within contrasting contexts. Gibbs (2013) lists multiple contrasting activities and identifies trends in practice over time with shifts towards learner centredness, strategic approaches quality enhancement, recognition of the social and contextual nature of development. He also notes a shift towards scholarship, theory and empiricism and categorises activity by focus on individuals, groups or institutions.

The paper presented here builds on Gibb's (2013) in an attempt to capture current orientations to academic development. Each lens within the framework has its origins in a research field that is highly relevant to academic development and could provide theoretical underpinnings and inform effective practices. Each conception implies a role for the academic developer and those who are to be developed. The lenses differ not only in the research fields they draw upon but also in: the power differential between the developer and the to be developed, where learning or development is thought to occur, the instruments and skills

required of the academic developer and the affordances and issues that are prioritised for discussion or evaluation.

We do not suggest that any lens is superior to any other; each has a place, will reach some colleagues and not others and be effective in improving some aspects of practice and of little use in affecting others. This paper highlights the sometimes contradictory and political nature of academic development work. These complexities cannot be avoided but we would argue there is a wealth of knowledge that can inform academic developers in their practice and, equally importantly, enable them to push back when the demands placed upon them are unrealistic.

Thomas and Cordiner (2014) advise that academic development is necessarily a messy business and this should not be shied away from but should be the subject of analysis and reflection. This framework should help guide such thinking, ideally, lifting agents out of their immediate situation and personalities and into a reflexive and theory based analysis. If we were to presume to advocate a change in practice it would be to encourage those with academic development responsibilities, and here we would include heads of departments and central leadership teams as well as staff within dedicated units, to step out of their usual modes of operation and think again of what change they need to see and, taking into account each lens, how best to communicate with, listen to and support all staff through that change. We would also advocate that consideration be given to the specific roles of academic developers in any large scale initiative. They can be immensely powerful and effective but they cannot simultaneously be all things to all (wo)men however hard they try.

On a note of caution, the conceptual framework presented here is a summarising structure to aid sense making. It has not been used beyond a single institution. Nor are the lenses completely distinct, they overlap sometimes synergistically but sometimes the boundaries can be a point of uncertainty. For example, as an academic developer working with students, the teacher would draw on the discipline to inform course content. As an academic developer working with employees, the content of courses should align with institutional strategy. There are no rules for determining what weight should be given to each influence and under which circumstance. The developer must use their professional judgement but as we concluded in Section 1 above there is no unified profession.

9.0 Conclusions

A series of lenses on the academic development of learning and teaching are offered in an effort to identify the implied roles, relationships, activities and theoretical roots of alternative approaches. In this endeavour we have attempted to provide a tool and a structure for planning and interpreting academic development and suggested areas ripe for further research. We have highlighted a number of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the academic developers' role. The secret to the wicked problem of institutional transformation of learning and teaching has to lie in recognition that no single approach to academic development is sufficient but that simultaneously considering a range of approaches and their theoretical perspectives can guide modest, multifaceted, coordinated and situated development.

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