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Beyond academic development as institutional practice: advancing community-led approaches

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ABSTRACT

We introduce the special issue entitled 'Beyond academic development as institutional practice: advancing community-led approaches' and offer critical commentary that advances the concept and practice of academic community development. Through repeated readings of the 10 articles from diverse contexts included in this issue, we draw out four main themes highlighting why and how academic communities beyond single institutions support academic development. First, we revise the initial conceptual framework of 'academic community development (ACD)', which focused the call for papers, presenting six dimensions rather than the previous three continua. Then, we consider the degree of 'institutionalisation' of this range of initiatives. From that analysis, we derive a typology of ACD initiatives. We then consider a) what common interests have been served by these communities, and whose they are; b) the focus of these communities in relation to the revised conceptual framework; and c) the essential ingredients for success. We emphasise that communities leverage assets in ways that traditional needs-based academic development often does not. We conclude with implications for typical academic development work.

Introduction

Most academic development (AD) literature focuses on initiatives that are sponsored by and take place within single higher education institutions (HEIs). This tendency reflects the historical growth of AD as a field of practice through dedicated units and departments in HEIs. Increasingly, however, AD activities are also occurring across, outside of, and even despite institutional settings and cultures, with participation and membership determined by factors other than institutional employment or affiliation.

For this special issue, we invited the field to think beyond AD as an institutional practice to consider approaches that listen to, empower, and develop *communities* of scholars and educators. While there has been considerable attention to communities of practice within AD, we sought examples and analyses

of AD approaches that extended beyond single institutional practices, instead serving academics at multiple institutions (trans-institutional communities) or outside of universities or colleges (extra-institutional communities). We reviewed more than 27 proposals, which yielded eight full articles and two reflections on practice. Based on these articles, we propose that such community-led approaches present models for asset-based, not just need-based, academic development. Led by and centring academics' own interests rather than the interests of an institution enables members to leverage and use their strengths creatively to promote their own development agendas.

Conceptual framework

We framed the call for proposals around Parkinson, McDonald, and Quinlan's (2020) alternative conceptualization of AD as centred around specific communities of academics who exist outside of or across higher education institutions. Their study focused on the AD needs of Syrian academics in exile, a group of academics who are bound by 'common experiences, needs, expectations, and access to opportunity' (p. 195), rather than by an employing institution. These features, referred to as 'common interests', define and hold together a community (Kenny, 2016). Parkinson et al.'s (2020) proposed a model for designing and critiquing AD activities that address the needs, experiences, choices, and opportunity structures of communities of academics, especially those who have been marginalised in, or excluded from, the academy. Their model outlined three main dialectics that shape how such activities may be organised philosophically and practically: individual-focused vs. community-focused; alleviating vs. transformative; and needs-based vs. asset-based.

While Parkinson et al.'s (2020) model presented these dialectics as continua, our reading of submissions to this special issue led us to conclude that the poles of each dialectic are not necessarily inversely proportional; that is, an initiative might target both dimensions of a given dialectic simultaneously. An initiative might, for instance, cater to both individual and community needs, though to varying degrees. Furthermore, these dimensions might be mutually supportive; an initiative might, for example, alleviate the needs of individuals by leveraging the assets of a community.

Accordingly, while there is still conceptual value and logic in these dialectic pairings, our adapted model comprises six, rather than three, axes, each representing a single dimension (Figure 1). Approaching our earlier dialectics as dynamic pairings of independent dimensions enables a fuller understanding of how AD as community development works. Each dimension could be operationalised to enable aggregated 'ratings' for each dimension. These 'ratings' could be based on polls of community members and key stakeholders. More likely, though, they would be based on interpretation of qualitative data such as proposals for funding, interviews, and reports of activities that would yield empirically-supported summary judgments of high, medium, or low on intended goals and actual outcomes. The revised framework is intended to broaden perspectives on the goals and processes used by communities (especially trans- and extra-institutional communities), facilitate critical reflection, and enable more structured and thorough evaluation of their impact. Summary
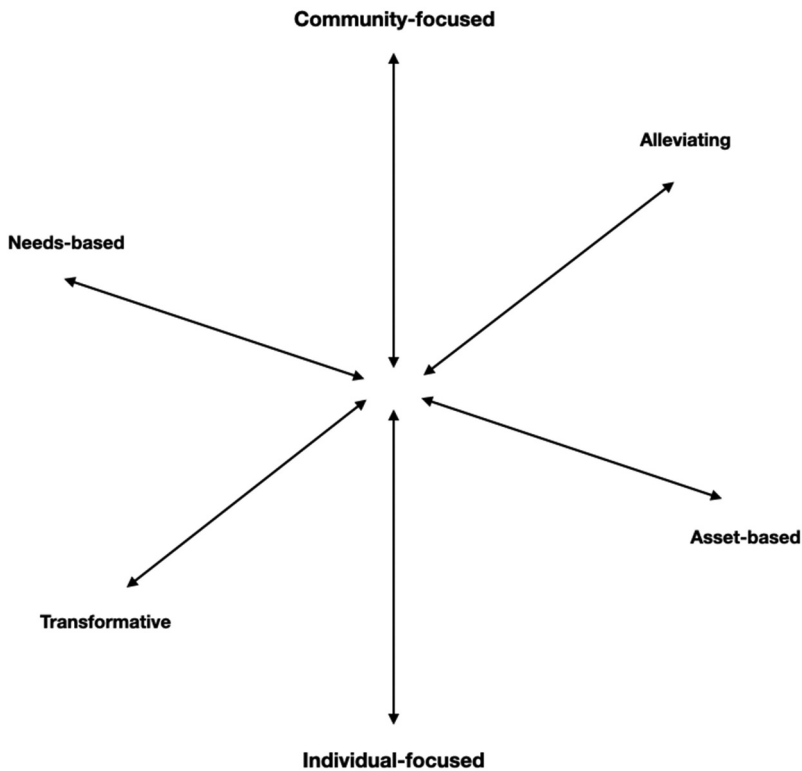
Revised framework for academic community development.

ratings for each of the six dimensions could be plotted to compare goals with outcomes or to compare initiatives.

Themes

As we read the articles, discussed them, and extracted summaries related to key questions and themes, we initially focused on what they told us about AD as community development, considering: a) what are the common interests of the members? b) what is the primary focus of the community-led initiative in terms of Parkinson et al.'s (2020) model framework? and c) what are its essential ingredients for success? However, in deciding how to sequence the papers, we were challenged to think as much about what 'institutionalisation' means and provides, as about what 'community' means and provides. We developed an organising structure for this special issue by considering how and in what ways each initiative was 'institutionalised' (David et al., 2019; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Tolbert and Zucker emphasised the ways institutions change from pre-institutional through semi-institutional to fully institutionalised structures, highlighting differences between these phases of evolution. The most informal, emergent communities described in this issue could be considered 'pre-institutionalised'. It may be that some of the emergent communities described in this issue will evolve into semi-institutionalised or fully institutionalised forms eventually, but our main emphasis is on charactering

existing communities rather than their evolution. Institutionalisation typically offers resource benefits, symbolic value, and/or efficiency (Tolbert & Zucker). In our categorisation, we focus more on the resource benefits that have accrued to communities through institutionalised structures.

We start with the more fully institutionalised initiatives and move through to the less institutionalised ones because our aim is to push the field beyond its fully institutionalised forms into innovative approaches to academic development that better reflect academics' agency in directing and creating supports for their own development (Åkerlind, 2005; Evans, 2023). Focusing on the agency of academics in creating new communities is also consistent with recent shifts in institutional theory toward institutional entrepreneurialism, through which new institutional forms are created by actors pursuing their own interests (David et al., 2019). We refer to the distinction in degree of institutionalisation across the initiatives featured in this special issue as the institutionalisation-community dialectic, suggesting, like Tolbert and Zucker (1996), that they fall on a continuum in degree of institutionalisation. We briefly introduce each paper in relation to this institutional-community dialectic before addressing each of the three key questions.

The first paper, by Pareigis, Kvarnström, Cefa, Bai, Zawacki-Richter, Uhlin, Jakobsson, and Theilmeier (this issue), explores an open networked learning (ONL) initiative, structured as a course organised by a network of partner universities. Participants are drawn primarily from the partner universities who contribute structures, resources, and leadership, but up to 25% of the course cohort is 'open' to learners at other institutions. As such, it is an 'interorganisational' course, still tied to traditional, institutionalised forms of learning and a network of established universities that are choosing to invest resources to cooperate on this initiative. Yet it was created and developed with the aim of nurturing a global community of educators who share an interest in online collaborative learning, open education, course design, and pursuing this aim through an inclusive admissions policy (www.opennetworkedlearning.se).

The second paper, by Narayan, Cochrane, Stretton, Chanane, Alizadeh, Birt, Bone, Cowie, Deneen, Hinze, Sinfield, Worthington, Goldacre, and Vanderburg (this issue), also analyses an open networked community, a special interest group on Mobile Learning (MLSIG) of ASCILITE, the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. In this example, we see an interesting balance between autonomy *from* and dependence *on* an umbrella organisation. The SIG under focus emerged from the ground up from a community of people with shared interests (Kenny, 2016), and the aims, objectives, and activities of the SIG are shaped by these shared interests rather than by top-down policy. Their focal activities involve collaborative research projects with joint products such as workshops, webinars, journal articles, and conference contributions. The initiative is sustained by leveraging the infrastructure and resources of ASCILITE, which, while not an employing HEI, nonetheless possesses some of the markers of institutionalisation, such as an administrative structure, income, formalised incorporation, and a registered membership (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).

In the first of two reflections on practice, Addy, Sciutto, and Hagan (this issue) reflect on an award-winning, multi-institutional initiative to address the needs of VITAL faculty members (visitors, instructors, teaching assistants, adjunct instructors, and lecturers who hold temporary positions and often have fewer resources and less support). While the initiative benefits from the organisational structures and formal agreements within an existing consortium across colleges and universities, its principal aims are to foster a sense of community across these faculty members and respond to their specific needs. It has helped to address isolation within institutions by brokering relationships, facilitating sharing and connection, providing access to relevant development opportunities and stimulating necessary conversations and intentionality within the participating institutions around the need for structural change.

In the third full article, Soares, Franco, Rosso & Dias (this issue) evaluate an intervention to address the lack of established cultures of both interdisciplinarity and AD within a Portuguese HEI (and within Portuguese HE more generally) and respond to colleagues' desire for educational development. Like the work detailed in Parkinson et al. (2020), the programme of activities is informed by an earlier needs assessment and here culminated in the formation of communities of practice around priority areas. Despite taking place within a single organisation, this intervention is a bottom-up initiative addressing institutional limitations across multiple campuses, has an explicit community emphasis, and was supported by external funding. As such, Soares and colleagues' contribution highlights that AD taking place within institutions is not always initiated or driven by the institution and may in fact work against entrenched institutional cultures.

In the issue's second reflection on practice, Pleschová (this issue) considers a 10-year series of community-driven projects that brought educational development to Eastern and Central Europe, a region without a tradition of AD. To respond to community needs, European funding was leveraged, requiring the support of research services at the PI's university. Funded initiatives brought together teachers from multiple universities, initially supported by educational developers from Northern and Western Europe.

In the next two papers, we see a shift toward informal sub-groups of larger academic communities. Huijser, Seeley & McPhee (this issue) report on a group of AD colleagues who came together through an ISSOTL (International Society of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) international collaborative writing group to focus on developing the idea of public SoTL. Like Narayan et al. (this issue), they were backed by and introduced through an established professional association, which is, itself, a community. Within this association, informal sub-communities arise as colleagues choose to participate in international writing groups centred on shared interests.

Likewise, Bone (this issue; also a co-author on the Narayan et al. [this issue] paper) and her colleagues explore a community of women leaders in educational technology that resulted from an initiative of ASCILITE. It appears that while ASCILITE provided a formal programme that brought together 29 women, subgroups such as Bone et al.'s (this issue) worked within this wider programme to develop their supportive, non-hierarchical (sub-)community.

In the final three papers, communities spring up without formal structures to support them and are initiated and sustained by people with common interests who find each other and benefit from learning together. Bayraktar (this issue) describes how the shift to online teaching necessitated by COVID-19 led to an academic development collective

emerging organically across multiple institutions in the same U.S. state. Unlike the initiative discussed by Addy et al. (this issue), which also involves resource-sharing and collaboration across academic developers in a region, Bayraktar's collective was not backed by a formal consortium or memoranda of understanding across institutions. In this way, it is less 'institutionalised' than many of the other initiatives featured thus far. It exists so long as individuals find value and are willing to voluntarily invest in keeping it going or until it becomes institutionalised.

The community described by Ndlovu, Mbatha, and Msiza (this issue) represents the most informal ties of all the examples presented in this special issue. Comprised of just three critical friends, their community is also the smallest. Although they all belong to the same university and discipline (education), they have built a collaborative, critical friendship in a liminal space, relying on a disused corner of campus (Room 32) as their home base. The physical infrastructure available on campus and their shared membership in the same faculty offer institutional supports but because their work is self-generated and self-sustaining, it is one of the least 'institutionalised' in this collection. As with Franco and Soares's (this issue) case and other examples, their community emerged to address needs that the institution alone could not address.

Finally, Owusu-Agyeman and Amoakohene (this issue) research a Ghanaian cross-university network of pracademics, staff who have industry roles and teach part-time in one or more universities. Their informal network supports the professional development of its members, enabling sharing of experiences, joint projects, and support in advocating for resources from their universities.

This issue ends with a review of the book, *What teaching looks like*: *Higher education through photographs*, written by U.S. academic developers Cassandra Volpe Horii and Martin Springborg. West and Dean (this issue), in their reading, emphasise the value of bringing teaching practice to the fore through situational photographs. The articles of

Typology of community-led approaches to academic development.

Community-led approach	Characteristics
Sponsored	Aligned with/responsive to institutional policy; marketed through and delivered within single institutions or across multiple institutions within formal collaborative frameworks; participation/membership may or may not be voluntary/open
Consolidated	A pre-existing practice or community is reified through naming, codification/theorisation, and marketing, often following the receipt of initial funding; moves from informal to formal following reification
Nested	Situated within a wider institution (whether HEI, learned society, professional association or other); leverages the infrastructure, resources, and networks of the wider institution; caters to a sub-community of the institutional population who shares interests, needs or identities; participation/membership typically voluntary, open to those within the wider institutional population
Spin-off	Develops out of a pre-existing community due to interest among a subset of members around an emerging theme, concern, or practice, and may become autonomous (as opposed to nested); membership/participation may be limited initially to those involved at the point of spin-off
Organic	Emerges informally based on shared needs or interests; strong social/relational dimension.
Enterprising	Established to address perceived limitations, exclusionary tendencies, unsuitability, irrelevance, or absence of institutional AD provision or culture.
School of thought	Develops over time as the work of trailblazing individuals or collectives gains visibility, traction, or take-up; may be dispersed with unclear boundaries; membership/participation is open and based on alignment with vision/philosophy

this issue, like the photos in that book, provide a range of snapshots of academic communities and their contexts.

Across the range of examples presented in this special issue, we see the beginnings of a possible typology. We set this out tentatively in Table 1, with the caveat that it needs further exploration and refinement.

These categories are not exclusive, and most initiatives will possess features of two or more, or may shift over time (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). However, they offer a possible framework for explaining and mapping the characteristics and entrepreneurial genesis of community-led approaches (David et al., 2019) as they become more prevalent and diverse.

In the next sub-sections, we discuss each of the three key questions we laid out at the beginning of this section about the communities reported on in these articles, exploring the common interests that bind them, their foci, and success ingredients. In doing so, we flesh out our conceptual framework, illuminate how communities leverage assets to support academics' development, and suggest what these initiatives may imply for 'traditional' HEI-based AD practices.

The communities across these papers are defined by characteristics of members, their roles, their scholarly interests, or their geo-political locales. In terms of characteristics, we expected to find initiatives that serve groups marginalised from traditional institutions by identity-related characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, or sexual orientation. This special issue includes contributions from a group of women in STEM (Bone et al., this issue) and a group of three early career, Black staff without PhDs in a research-intensive South African university with a historically White-dominated faculty (Ndlovu et al., this issue). Like the ASCILITE Women in Academic Leadership programme (Bone et al.), various organisations around the world run programmes to support women's development and racially/ethnically minoritised scholars' development. Such programmes support staff who experience isolation within their own institutions, exclusion from majority-based networks, and other structural and cultural barriers to career progression and flourishing. Ndlovu et al. highlight the safety, autonomy, and solidarity that bottom-up communities of practice can offer, and which are often critical for marginalized academics to be empowered agents for their own academic success. Identity-based programmes for academic development have been in place for some time. Comparative analyses that explore how these programmes leverage assets within marginalised communities and bring about transformational change at different levels would be helpful.

A second category of common interests revolves around marginalised or third-space *roles*, exemplified by Addy et al., Bayraktar, Ndlovu et al., and Owusu-Agyeman and Amoakohene (all in this issue). Traditional AD has underserved teaching staff who do not have a Ph.D., those whose expertise is rooted in industry or practice rather than doctoral education, and those with visiting, adjunct, or otherwise precarious teaching-only contracts. Academics with part-time or fixed-term status may be excluded from the programmes available to full-time staff and, if they participate, the programmes may not speak to their unique concerns. Addy et al. reflect on how these problems were overcome

by bringing together VITAL staff, who are often isolated in their own departments, in a cross-institutional community with activities designed specifically to address their unique needs and assets. Staff in these kinds of roles came together organically in a region in Ghana (Owusu-Agyeman and Amoakohene, this issue). In the U.S., an academic developer can be the only person in their institution doing AD. Thus, they can also feel isolated and under-resourced to address multiple, major issues in their institutions. To find others who share their common interests, they need to seek counterparts in other institutions (e.g. Bayraktar, this issue).

In other cases, community members share similar roles in their institution but those roles are not necessarily marginalised. Common scholarly/professional interests, often in specialty areas that are not shared by colleagues within their own institutions, inspire these colleagues to form communities beyond their own universities (Huijser et al.; Narayan et al.; Pareigis et al., all this issue). Professional associations, such as the umbrella organisations for Narayan et al.'s and Huijser et al.'s sub-communities, are traditional sites of academic community. Academics often identify more strongly with their disciplines than their institutional communities, and their research development often occurs through professional associations. Their development as teachers could also be supported through disciplinary societies. For example, Pleschová's (this issue) reference to teaching development activities through the European Political Science Association points to disciplines as potential sites of AD as community development (see nested communities in Table 1).

Finally, under-resourced geo-political locations lead to the formation of communities as a way of securing resources. For example, Pleschová (this issue) describes the lack of resources for AD in post-Soviet universities. Franco and Soares (this issue) initiated educational development activities in Portugal in a research-intensive university that had neglected teaching development. Although Ndlovu and colleagues' (this issue) institution offered AD, its provision was not designed to promote the necessary reflection, learning and growth that these early career academics, accustomed to different workplace contexts, needed to make sense of new territory, roles, and expectations. In all these cases, the community arose from the inside to address the gaps they experienced, consistent with the 'enterprising' archetype in Table 1.

While these examples highlight profound inequalities between institutions in access to high quality AD, they also highlight the creativity, commitment, and stamina of academics in those situations to redress these inequities. Unfortunately, such initiatives alone cannot change the much larger global systems that have created and sustain these inequities. Efforts like Pareigis et al.'s (this issue) open networked learning approaches may offer sustainable ways to alleviate needs, insofar as open learners may benefit from the resources provided by more privileged institutions.

Our conceptual framework, a revision of Parkinson et al.'s (2020) model of AD as community development, presents six dimensions on which to characterise these initiatives (see Figure 1). In proposing this special issue, we were intrigued to see which dimensions of this framework featured most prominently in the work of the communities under focus, or in authors' analysis thereof.

Reviewing the submissions, we find that *need-based* approaches are more common than *asset-based* ones. Addressing the unmet needs of individual participants – whether those associated with identity-based characteristics (Bone et al.; Ndlovu et al., this issue), role (Addy et al.; Bayraktar; Owusu-Agyeman & Amoakohene, all this issue) or geo-political location (Franco & Soares; Pleschová, both this issue) – was often the initial impetus for initiatives. At the less formal end of the spectrum (e.g. Ndlovu et al., this issue), these needs constitute the shared interests around which individuals coalesced to form communities. At the more formal end (e.g. Addy et al., this issue), systematic needs assessment processes were undertaken and determined the membership and agendas of communities.

This lack of (at least explicitly) asset-based approaches prompts us to consider 1) why this might be the case, and 2) what an asset-based AD approach might entail in practice. We approach these in turn.

Firstly, much mainstream institutional AD implicitly assumes a deficit that needs addressing (Lawrence et al., 2023; Scott & Lawrence, 2022). It is typically structured around programmes wherein experienced staff teach, mentor, coach, and/or assess early career staff, introducing them to best practice and inducting them into institutional norms. Such initiatives also commonly arise out of needs assessments. The framework is therefore hierarchical and centred on recipients' need for valid knowledge and skills. Owing to the prevalence of this AD paradigm, we are perhaps conditioned to associate AD first and foremost with addressing need.

Secondly, asset-based approaches are also likely to be limited where there is little or no established AD practice, or an understanding of what AD should entail or how one's competencies, prior experience, or other assets might be leveraged (e.g. Franco & Soares, this issue), In both situations, marginalised individuals or communities may be unlikely to perceive their circumstances in terms of assets, without the benefit of guided reflective prompts. Finally, individuals are perhaps more likely to opt-in to communities because they offer something they need, whether that is intellectual stimulation, resources, experience, or mutual support. These reasons may partly explain the lack of explicit acknowledgment and focus on assets among the communities researched in this special issue.

Yet there is clear evidence of assets and strengths being leveraged, and of the role community plays in facilitating this leverage, even when an asset-based approach is not foregrounded as such in the featured articles. Some of the initiatives are rooted in shared curiosity or intellectual interest, which read more like asset-based foundations (e.g. Huijser et al.; Pareigis et al., both this issue). Likewise, other initiatives that are nested within, or spin-offs of, established organisations leverage the assets of the 'parent' organisation to new or different ends (Narayan et al., this issue). In other examples, bringing people together as a community enables assets to be recognised and nurtured (e.g. Owusu-Agyeman & Amoakohene, this issue). Designing the initiatives in ways that suited their members also allows assets to flourish where they might not have in traditional structures (Ndlovu et al., this issue). Some of these new communities enable the leveraging of assets, as well as the joint creation of new assets. For example, because of the AD collective described by Bayraktar (this issue), colleagues shared and built upon each other's resources and created new state-wide programmes such as workshops and faculty fellowships. Collaborations among pracademics led to the creation of consultancy

services on environmental health curriculum and practices (Owusu-Agyeman & Amoakohene, this issue).

These examples suggest that community-based approaches may support the recognition, development, and leveraging of assets in ways that typical HEI-based AD approaches do not. Non-hierarchical structures may be more conducive to sharing and also prompt less experienced or credentialed members to recognise that their knowledge, resources, and experience may be valuable to others. Community-led approaches will inevitably comprise members who possess more assets than others owing to experience and other factors, which may manifest as a form of hierarchy. Even communities of practice, for example, comprise old timers and newcomers – but the emphasis is, or should be, on participation rather than gatekeeping or assessment (Wenger, 1998).

To promote and enhance asset-based approaches to AD, it may be useful to go beyond the level of conceptual synthesis offered by Parkinson et al. (2020) and consider applying or adapting specific tools and approaches used in the field of community development to AD. In particular, asset mapping might catalyse a shift towards asset-based approaches. Within Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) asset-based community development (ABCD) approach, asset mapping engages a community in exploring, identifying, and mapping their collective assets, before applying them in developing solutions to specific social issues or problems (Lightfoot et al., 2014). Assets can be tangible, such as books or funding, or intangible, such as skills, attributes, or traditions. Crucially, asset mapping as a systematic activity draws attention to the existence and value of these assets where they might ordinarily go unnoticed, and thereby upholds a focus on strengths, rather than deficits. Asset mapping has an obvious affinity with appreciative enquiry-based approaches (see, e.g. Lawrence et al., 2023), and could also complement the foundational needs assessments that undergird much of mainstream AD. Alongside reconceptualization of AD as community development, work is needed to develop a practical toolkit drawing on community development strategies, for application in the field of AD.

This special issue also led us to interrogate the transformative dimension of Parkinson et al.'s (2020) framework more deeply. Influenced by Kenny (2016), the transformative dimension was initially conceived in opposition to an alleviating dimension, which related both to the marginalising or constraining structural conditions and/or prevailing culture within which academics work. According to this conception, alleviating academic community development (ACD) prepares academic communities to work within these conditions and mitigate their negative effects but does not challenge the conditions themselves. In contrast, transformative ACD seeks to improve the circumstances of the community through structural change. Some submissions to this special issue present evidence of ACD initiatives being transformative for individuals, perhaps by expanding their perceptions of a phenomenon (e.g. learning or teaching), increasing their sense of value in what they are learning, and leading to changes in their individual practice (Pugh, 2011), but do not present evidence of impact on the wider context.

In other examples, notably the VITAL initiative explored by Addy et al. (this issue), the community's work showed signs of catalysing transformation at the level of institutions. Elsewhere, there were signs of culture change at sector or national levels, such as in

Pleschová's (this issue) work with the European Political Science Association. These examples, then, suggest that transformation can occur at *micro* (individual, community), *meso* (e.g. institutional), or *macro* (e.g. international, national, sector) levels. In using the term transformation in this framework, we specifically refer to meso- or macro-level change.

As highlighted in the institutionalisation-community dialectic section above, in some cases, a key ingredient of success is the resources and infrastructure provided by an institution, whether a consortium of universities (Huijser et al.; Narayan et al., both this issue), professional association (Huijser et al.; Narayan et al., both this issue), or an external funding body with funds administered through a principal investigator's institution (Franco & Soares; Pleschová, both this issue).

Notably, many of the more informal, organic, or spin-off communities are removed in some way from usual departmental and university structures, hierarchies, politics, and accountability schemes. In these cases, the article names the importance of creating and maintaining a non-hierarchical, open, safe, trusting, learning-oriented, collaborative, and reflective ethos. Often there is an implication that these cultural features are not characteristic of the typical academic environments in which participants worked, making the community a 'refuge' (Bayraktar, this issue). Trust is foregrounded, particularly in relation to emotional vulnerability and mutual support and empathy (Bayraktar; Bone, both this issue). In some contexts, though, trust is described as essential even for cognitive aspects of joint work (Pleschová, this issue), particularly when collaboration involved self-reflection on practices or assumptions (Huijser et al., this issue), which often characterises teaching development. This kind of deeper reflection also requires time and space for new or shared understandings to emerge, which the community offered (e.g. Huijser et al.; Ndlovu et al., both this issue).

Several of the communities are engaged in joint projects, which seems to help hold them together through a common goal and shared practice. These joint projects include teaching-related endeavours and writing projects (Bone et al.; Huijser et al.; Narayan et al.; Ndlovu et al., all this issue). Interestingly, the ISSOTL association shifted from an emphasis solely on individual scholarship of teaching projects to collaborative projects by introducing international collaborative writing groups in 2012 (Matthews et al., 2017). This policy initiative seems to recognise the importance of collaboration and community in AD.

Communities, in general, benefit from platforms that enable remote collaboration. The theme of online collaborative learning is a focal point of Pareigis et al.'s (this issue) open-networked learning communities and Narayan et al.'s (this issue) special interest group. However, other groups, particularly with the shift to remote and online communication seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, were enabled by (Bayraktar, this issue) or supported through (Huijser et al.; Franco and Soares, both this issue) virtual collaboration tools.

Some form of facilitation or stable leadership, even in non-hierarchical communities, is also crucial. More institutionalised efforts have formal leadership

arrangements while organic communities created leadership 'hubs' (e.g. Bayraktar, this issue). Some initiatives clearly exist due to the commitment and stamina of key individuals. Finally, several of the initiatives, whether implicitly or explicitly, refer to grounding in scholarship, scholarly activity, or conceptual tools as critical to success.

Conclusion

This analysis of 10 ACD initiatives has several implications for practice. First, there are groups and areas of practice that are not well-served by traditional, single university-based AD programmes. Some of these gaps are being filled by informal staff networks within universities that operate separately from AD units or by consortia of universities, professional associations, external funding for discrete projects, and organically emergent communities. We might collaborate with these internal staff networks, recognising that these offer complementary AD activities. We also might intentionally leverage our universities' existing inter-university networks, consortia, and partnerships to address shared concerns. For example, we might engage in joint projects, such as the shared pedagogical development provision offered across the eight-member Regional University Network European University or edited books that facilitate reflection on shared concerns or practices (e.g. Stensaker et al., 2017; Thomas & Quinlan, 2024).

Second, we highlight how these non-traditional contexts help us to consider how we might be more explicit in adopting community development tools, especially to identify and leverage assets within the communities with whom we work. A set of practical tools for ACD, which draws on community development models such as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), is a useful next step to flesh out and further develop asset-based approaches to AD.

Third, academic developers in traditional roles may be asked to contribute to or advise on initiatives in situations where AD is new (e.g. Parkinson et al., 2020; Pleschová, this issue). As consultants, we need to consider not only how to design effective AD for these situations, but also how to build capacity in local communities to sustain initiatives that may have start-up or time-limited funding (e.g. Franco & Soares; Parkinson et al.; Pleschova, all in this issue). Further work on how to conceive, design and embed AD in various complex contexts such as conflict, post-communist, post-conflict, and post-colonial contexts is needed (see, for example, Abdulkerim et al., 2022; Belluigi & Parkinson, 2020; Parkinson, 2019).

Finally, within our own traditional programming, these initiatives highlight the importance of asset-based approaches, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the maintenance of liminal spaces in which academics can be vulnerable, safely try out new practices, and take time away from other pressures to reflect deeply on their teaching experiences. Trust, time, and common interests are all critical to this effort.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Tom Parkinson, PhD SFHEA, is a Reader in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Kent. His research focuses on higher education in the context of forced displacement. His impact through leading on academic development programmes for Syrian academics in exile was recognised with an SRHE Accolade in 2023.

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