RESEARCH ARTICLE:

On 'Becoming' Contemplative Academic Development Practitioners: Reflections through Collaborative Autoethnography

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Received: 03 August 2023 | **Revised:** 27 March 2024 | **Published:** 03 April 2024

Reviewing Editor: Dr. Kehinde Adewumi, Durban University of Technology

Abstract

The onslaught of COVID-19 heralded a turn in higher education as society began to question the purpose, values and practices of higher education. COVID-19 presented the unique opportunity to re-imagine and re-envision how one conceptualises the roles and responsibilities of academic development practitioners. How are they responding to their own evolving selves, their environmental cues, and shaping the shifts of redirection within higher education? In this article, we draw from two research traditions to examine the processes of re-imagining academic developers' becoming: contemplative pedagogy and collective autoethnography. In our data collection, we use the concurrent model in autoethnography as we draw on personal memory data, archival materials, self-observation, self-reflection, self-analysis and interviews with each other. This contributed to a thick description of our personal and professional lives and practices. We show how these collective research traditions and approaches provided nuanced understandings of the role of place and space in evolving academic development in higher education. This article argues for the value of a contemplative autoethnography as an approach to transforming academic development practices, particularly in providing insight into professional development, identity and personal experience.

Keywords: *autoethnography; contemplative pedagogy; reflection; professional development; academic development*

Introduction

Academic Development (AD) practitioners have been traditionally expected to be the possessors of "systemic knowledge, intellectual capital" (Graham, 2012: 439) necessary for the effective functioning of a university. The COVID-19 pandemic that besieged the world in 2020 catapulted AD staff in higher education (HE) from the periphery to the centre as the institutional leaders, lecturers, and students looked to AD to provide guidance and leadership during those turbulent times. AD practitioners also needed to re-imagine and develop anew what constituted this systemic and intellectual capital. During the pandemic period, as much as academic staff required support to adjust and continue their curriculum practices, they also needed compassion as they faced an uncertain future. Some faced trauma in their personal lives as they simultaneously had to cope with infection with a threat of death and potentially dying relatives whilst maintaining their professional career responsibilities. COVID-19 also allowed AD practitioners to re-imagine and re-envision their baseline resources and concurrently redirect towards refreshed 'becomings' as academic developers. As we take this opportunity that the COVID-19 pandemic has provided to pause, we reflect on and contemplate our practices as academic developers and our role in the shifting HE landscape.

In the last two decades, there have been considerable shifts in AD as it continues to be shaped by massification, globalisation and an exponential focus on research and evidence-based practice. The changing education landscape in HE has given rise to new roles and responsibilities for AD practitioners, which include leadership roles at their institutions (Sugrue *et al*., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic heralded a shift in HE, bringing AD staff

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from the periphery to the centre as they led the university through the tumultuous period. The critical question many were asking was, "How can higher education become a more multidimensional enterprise, one that draws on the full range of human capacities for knowing, teaching, and learning" (Palmer *et al*., 2010: 2) As AD staff led initiatives at their institutions the need for HE to focus on the well-being of both students and staff was foregrounded. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014), mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to her or his community". Compassion underpins the promotion of well-being and is defined "as a motivation that is focused on the sensitivity to suffering in self and others" (Maratos *et al*., 2019: 265). Staff working in HE should be aware of the needs of others they come into contact with. They should be able to respond with empathy and kindness. Waddington (2018) contends that "kindness and compassion are not separate from being professional; rather, they represent the fundamentals of humanity in the workplace" (Waddington, 2018: 88).

We, the authors, have worked together for nine years in academic development before Author 2 left the university at the end of 2018. Author 1 is an Academic Development Practitioner (ADP) based in a faculty, and Author 2 was an Advisor: Special Projects based in the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and now a HE Student Success Data Coach at Siyaphumelela.

> *"It was on my quest to delve deeper into what underpinned AD practices that I met Author 2. When I walked into her office, which was painted bright green, she was surrounded by hundreds of books, files and cardboard boxes. She was in the process of packing up to move to the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Teaching and Learning's office, where she was seconded as a project leader for the General Education Component (We would later work together in designing and implementing the General Education Component). She enveloped me with her warm and larger-than-life welcome. She was very interested in finding out more about what my experience in teaching was, and it was good to note that we both shared a common belief system and had a background as public-school teachers"* (Author 1).
>
> *"I sat in the green room (my office) awaiting Author 1 visit to my office. I was alone in the office. I had my computer and desk. My phone. My own space. It was 2011, and Author 1 had just started as the ADP in a faculty. She was one of the first decentralised ADPs employed. The uncertainty of the scope of AD work became clear during our conversation. Author 1 was called upon to make her path for her journey in AD."* (Author 2)

Our combined years of experience in AD up until the end of 2018 was thirty years. By the time the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our lives in March 2020, Author 2 was no longer working at the institution but appointed as a Student Success Data Coach at Siyaphumelela. The Siyaphumelela Project is part of a national project funded by the American-based Kresge Foundation, which seeks to improve student success at South African universities by implementing targeted programmes and policies founded upon relevant institutional data analytics. Author 2 was providing support as a coach to staff across various academic institutions. Author 1 was actively adapting to the 'new normal' at the institution during this COVID-19 pandemic. Part of this adaptation was being aware and mindful of the needs of staff who needed compassion and becoming more reflective of their practice. Author 1 was part of the institutional team that started an online teaching and learning support programme for staff in April 2020 to guide lecturers in the transition to emergency remote teaching and learning by hosting professional development sessions called Curriculum Conversations (CC). The CC team invited both internal and external guest speakers from a variety of institutions and contexts to share their knowledge, practices and insights that staff could utilise in the design and delivery of the curriculum during the disruptive COVID-19 pandemic period. During one of these sessions in November 2020, Author 2 was invited to share the *Introduction to Contemplative Pedagogy in Higher Education*.

After the session, Author 1 approached Author 2 as she identified a common interest in contemplative practices in academic development. This signalled the beginning of a new phase in our journey as we worked together to answer the question, *what can we learn from Contemplative practice to enhance our pedagogies and practices in academic development?*

Understanding Contemplative Practices in Higher Education

Contemplative pedagogy and contemplative practices are rooted in educational philosophies and spiritual practices that value mindfulness, awareness, reflection and compassion (Barbezat and Bush, 2013; Hart, 2004; Blinne, 2014). When contemplative, we discover our connectedness to each other and the world through empathy and compassion (Zajonc, 2009). We have experienced that this pedagogy and practice is essential when fully engaged in the process of connected knowing and using an integrative approach to learning and teaching (Belenky *et al*., 1986).

The Tree of Contemplative Practices (see Figure 1), developed by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (Mind, 2021), provides a range of contemplative pedagogical practices, some of which we may have explored to include in the classroom. The contemplative tree has as its roots the practices of "awareness" and "communication and connection" (Mind, 2021). There are seven branches that describe different contemplative practices, with sub-practices in each branch. The seven branches are categorised as practices promoting stillness, generative, creative, ritual/cyclical, focussed on movement, relational, and activism. Contemplative practices quiet the mind to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight. Examples of contemplative practice include sitting in silence and many forms of single-minded concentration, including meditation, contemplative prayer, mindful walking, focused experiences in nature, yoga, and other contemporary physical or artistic practices (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2007).

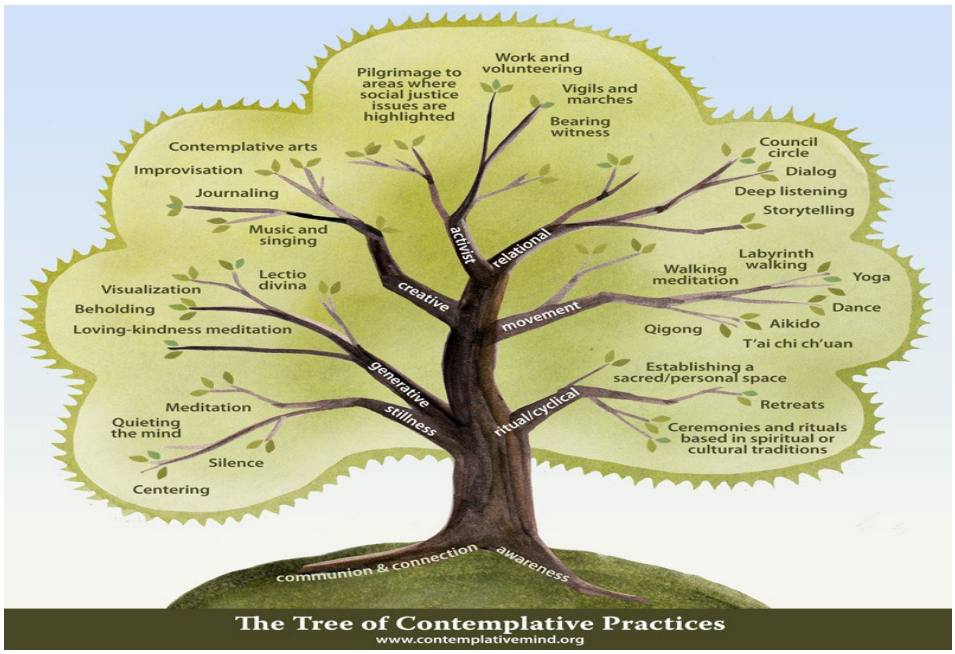

Figure 1: Mind (2021) – The Tree of Contemplative Practices Center for Contemplative Mind in Society http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree

The contemplative practices that are relational have more commonly used activities such as the "council circle" (Palmer, 2004), storytelling, deep listening, and dialogue. The "activism" branch contains several practices such as taking trips to sites of social justice activity, working and volunteering for social causes, attending marches and vigils, and bearing witness. Beyond these examples, the activist component of contemplative practice has been gaining some traction over the past few years to the point where it might be justifiably sprouting its sapling in higher education (Mah y Busch, 2014).

The Labyrinth walking as part of the movement of contemplative practices has also been used by many HE institutions across the United States of America and in Australia. It promotes tenets of transformative learning, reflection, meditation and rest. "The labyrinth is a metaphor for a journey to the centre of our deepest self and back out with a broadened understanding of who we are" (Keary, nd.) For students and staff, contemplative pedagogy encourages them to become aware of the internal world and connect their learning to their values and sense of meaning. This enables them to form richer, deeper relationships with their peers, communities, and the world around them. They feel more connected to their lived, embodied experience of their learning (Contemplative Pedagogy Network, 2020.

Figure 2: Image of a labyrinth
https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.f__TSzdpRqPRLQwTZy3YFAHaHb?w=185andh=186andc=7andr=0ando=5andpid=1.7

Our experiences are downloaded and hardwired into our subconscious minds as stimulus-response behaviours. The behaviour-activating stimuli are signals detected from the external world and/or signals that arise through biochemical reactions from within the body, such as emotions, pleasure and pain. According to Pert and Marriot (2008:18) awareness is the property of the whole organism, and in the psychosomatic network, we see the conscious and [subconscious] mind infusing every aspect of the physical body. The body is the subconscious mind.

We become aware of our internal world and get to know ourselves as we experiment in the "laboratories of awareness" (Jousse, 2000: 26) in which

> *... the experimenter is simultaneously the experimented. Man is no longer 'this unknown': [s]he becomes [her/his] own discoverer. The only person one can know well is oneself. But to know oneself well, one must observe oneself thoroughly. The true laboratory is an observation laboratory of the self, so called because it is difficult to learn to see oneself ... While we will never be able to step outside of ourselves, thanks to Mimism, everything that is re-played through us is within us. All science is awareness. All objectivity is subjectivity. The true Laboratory is, therefore, the Laboratory of the self. To instruct oneself is to develop oneself.* (Jousse, 2000: 25-26).

Siegel (2008) also reminds us that as we are mindful and pay attention to our experiences, scientifically recognised changes in our physiology, our mental functions and interpersonal relationships are created. We can be mindfully aware of our inner selves and the other person in a relationship as we focus our attention either on ourselves or the internal world of the other in the present moment. In so doing, we "feel felt" and connected in a vibrant and alive relationship, an immediate experience (Siegel, 2008). The feeling of being understood and at peace as we can recognise and understand the energetic, emotional signals from others.

Mindfulness results in patience, self-compassion, and wisdom, amongst other attributes (Siegel 2008: 67). When we are mindfully aware, we also become more attuned to ourselves. Thus, we reflect on our inner lives moment by moment with curiosity, openness, acceptance and love (Siegel, 2008: 70). Our beliefs act like filters and change how we see the world, and our biology adapts to those beliefs (Lipton, 2005; Church, 2008). It is not our genes that control our lives, it is our beliefs. We need to learn how to harness our minds to promote growth. Teachers can remove hope by programming our students to believe they are powerless.

> Your beliefs become your thoughts
> Your thoughts become your words
> Your words become your actions
> Your actions become your habits
> Your habits become your values
> Your values become your destiny
>
> *Mahatma Gandhi* (Lipton 2005: 114)

Academic Developers are 'life-givers

As Academic Developers, we believe we are called upon to be "life-givers" to the teachers attending our professional development workshops. We are "life-givers" as we guide teachers to channel their passion and potential to enhance their learning and that of their students. Although academic development practitioners (ADPs) are not directly involved in teaching students, they impact learning, teaching and assessment as facilitators, advisors, mentors, catalysts or consultants to teaching staff (Bath and Smith, 2004). AD and teaching staff collaborate, interact, debate and engage with each other as they develop various learning, teaching and assessment strategies and interventions. This practice is in harmony with Watkins' and Mortimore's definition of teaching, which states that "teaching can be considered as any activity by an individual that is aimed at facilitating or encouraging learning in another" (cited in Bath and Smith, 2004: 14). As AD staff we also work as agents of change as we work with teaching staff to transform learning, teaching, and assessment at our respective institutions. This is mainly underpinned by reflective practice processes where we sometimes adopt the role of a 'critical friend' as teaching staff reflect on their practice within safe spaces that we create. AD staff also support and develop innovative and creative ideas that teaching staff may want to implement in their classrooms.

To be successful, AD practice must be collaborative as we work and connect with others as we endeavour to transform HE. We believe that AD staff play a vital role in HE institutions, and they should focus on working 'through' staff to affect sustainable changes. We concur with Wenger that 'communities of practice' encompass the 'basic building blocks of a social learning system' (2000: 229). In our experience, teaching staff learn 'from and with each other' (Govender, 2012) when they share their teaching challenges and successes with colleagues. In this context, true learning takes place that shapes the 'acts of teaching'. Sociocultural theories of learning underpin our practice where AD practice is viewed as "enabling participation in knowing" (Northedge, 2003:19). Academic disciplines are particular "knowledge communities' as specialist knowledge is required to be a member of that community (Northedge, 2003:19). Northedge argues that knowledge "arises out of a *process* of discoursing, situated within communities" (Northedge, 2003: 19). At our institution, the teaching staff are regarded as disciplinary experts with experience in industry but some lack pedagogical knowledge. Northedge (2003) argues that participation within the selected community is what is important.

> *There should be no superficial teaching. When one has given one's breath, one has to give one's entire being. To give oneself in teaching is to give life, or expressed better still, to give one's own life (…). One does not only give one's life for someone by dying for him. One also truly gives one's life to someone by living for and in him. The true life-giver continues to live on in himself but no longer for himself. Indeed, from some point, he begins to live with such power and superabundance that he lives on also in the one who has been given life. The true life-giver has to give himself without abandoning himself. For the life-giver-teacher, giving his life to someone will be to give him all his living geste, all his global, vital mimodrama* (Jousse 2000: 411).

With our whole being, we have the "power" and "superabundance" of feeling, intuition and physical and sensory awareness. As a "life-giver teacher", we need to guard against losing our own lives and becoming despondent. We are reminded to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students (and staff), which is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (Hooks, 1994: 13).

As AD practitioners, we form communities that engage in rituals of learning. Rituals are intrinsically rhythmic and can be aligned with natural rhythms. Thus, rituals in the classroom are powerful for preserving and enhancing harmonious rhythms. Rhythmic patterns of activity and rest, depicted in oscillation, allow for full engagement. The human capacity for full engagement is driven by the rhythmic patterns of high performance and personal renewal. Each human life moves, oscillates, vibrates, and pulsates through seasonal flows or regular cycles. As humans interact, so too do their energies oscillate, vibrate, and pulsate in a wave-like manner, thus either enhancing or diminishing the intensity of the interaction depending on the wavelengths and frequency of the energy waves.

Mining our own lives and lived experiences

In writing about using contemplative practices in our professional lives, we turned to Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) as we can reflect on our professional practice with "an ethnographic analysis of the cultural context and implications of that experience" (Lapadat, 2017: 589). Working within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it is difficult to separate our personal and professional lives as both permeate and mesh into one. As 'life givers', we conduct all our professional development work with our whole being. This requires an intersection of values, beliefs and practice. Through CAE, we were able to converge our "energy and data to create a richer pool of data from multiple sources" (Chang *et al*., 2012: 89). By using CAE, we were able to "collect personal memory data, interview each other, observe and analyse each other's self-identities, or collect archival data about each other" (Roy and Uekusa, 2020: 387).

Our journey into AD: Looking through the lens of contemplative practices

Author 1: "*I joined the institution as a Curriculum Developer in 2011. My background was in Basic Education, where I taught English and Dramatic Arts. I also worked as a part-time lecturer in the Post Graduate Diploma in higher education at a comprehensive university before working at my present university. My entrance into AD was quite daunting as I discovered that it was enacted differently across the university. Working in a decentralised post also comes with challenges, and the absence of a job description complicated matters further. Being a resilient and a proactive person I met the different ADPs at my institution to understand their enactment of AD with the intention of selecting the particular practices that I would adopt. I found that the AD practices were varied and cut across staff, student and curriculum development. I continued to read extensively on AD, attended workshops and became involved with academic development activities at the institution. I was delighted when I received an email in April 2012 with information on the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip) for Academic Developers being offered at Rhodes University. Joining the second cohort of the PGDip was the next step of my trajectory into AD. I feel that the PGDip has given me a 'voice' and the 'reason for my AD being. It was during the course of discovering who I was as an AD practitioner that I realised that I could draw on my earlier experiences of using Contemplative Practices."*

Author 2 *"My journey into Academic Development started in 1997 when I was the chair of the National Curriculum Committee on Chemistry qualifications across all the universities of technology (they were Technikons until the change in the early 2000s). As a Chemistry undergraduate, I took an interest in Education whilst lecturing Chemistry and then completed a National Higher Diploma in Education. I found my engagement with students and staff both interesting and inspiring. I soon realised that my heart was moving towards a love for a different way of knowing and being in the field of Academic Development. I moved into Curriculum development in 2000, where I had the freedom to unleash my more creative side. I explored together with academics from a variety of disciplines various ways of using technology to be more creative and enthusiastic about their classroom interactions (Timm, 2005). Little did I know that it was my introduction to contemplative practices in Higher Education.*

My understanding of contemplative practice was that it was reserved for religious life (Keating, 1999). I started my religious Christian journey in the late 1990s as a Lay minister, which finally led to my ordination as a priest in the Anglican Church in 2011. During this time, I engaged in contemplative practices of labyrinth walking, meditation, quiet mornings and liturgical dance to achieve "well-being, wisdom and healing ...in stressful times" (Plante, 2010). I soon discovered that contemplative practices existed in various religious and spiritual traditions and professional and non-professional healthcare outlets. Contemplative practices are also used in multidisciplinary ways, even in higher education, to achieve well-being (Bagshaw, 2014).

Setting out the Research Process

After our initial connection, we (the authors) had several more conversations about our contemplative practices in AD. Our conversations revealed more about our contemplative practices and experiences within AD. Author 1 took the lead in facilitating our reflective sessions. The process that followed was exploratory and began to unfold as we began to have deep conversations and used our written reflections as a stimulus. Although this made Author 1 feel both nervous and intrepid as we traversed uncharted territories, Author 2 felt comfortable as she previously had experience writing a collaborative autoethnography. In the first few weeks, we wrote about our journeys into AD. This required turning our gaze inward as we reflected on where it had all started. After we each wrote about our AD journeys, we had to share them with each other. We gave feedback, asked questions, sought clarity and commented on the written reflections. It was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, so we used Microsoft Teams

to upload our work and have online meetings. The online meetings allowed greater flexibility as we could meet more often without worrying about selecting a meeting place and following COVID-19 protocols.

During our online meetings, we discussed and agreed upon the questions guiding our second set of narratives, which focused on our contemplative practices. The questions made us dig deep and reflect on our memories of our life experiences and practices in AD. We sourced the evidence from our reflective journals, minutes of meetings, department documents and even photographs. As we wrote our stories, we experienced mixed emotions of pain and the joys of our experiences in AD. These emotions sometimes affected the writing process. We grappled with whether to share some episodes, which were painful and sometimes involved others. After discussions, we realised that it was important for us to be authentic. We also acted as critical friends as we responded to each other's narratives to ensure veracity and trustworthiness.

The next process was reading each other's narratives, self-reflections, and looking for emerging themes (coding). We did this first individually and then as a team. We met several times as we discussed the emerging themes on our journey into academic development (see Table 1 and Table 2). We were again amazed at the commonalities /similarities of our journeys and practices. We found that our narratives sometimes were intertwined at common intersections as we had worked with each other over the years on common projects. Although there were similarities, each narrative was also unique.

Table 1: Labyrinth of our academic development journey

Guiding questions	Emerging Themes from Narrative 1 and the Reflective Pieces
Where did we meet?	Common spaces Sharing stories Journey of discovery alone and together (What is AD all about?) Hospitality in persons (talk to people)
How did the journey begin?	Hostility in space (outside of AD, inner dis-ease, loss of identity, shifting of identity because of this hostility. Being authentic -find other ways of being through contemplative practices) Confusion Unaware
Moments of enlightenment	Finding my voice Partnerships In/formal spaces Reconnecting
Continuing the AD journey	Desolation (COVID- 19) Coming together AD re-imagined

Table 2: Using Contemplative Practices (CP) in Academic Development

Guiding questions	Emerging themes from the analysis	
	Author 1	Author 2
1. Factors which informed our decision to use contemplative practice in our AD work?	Personal experience of CP as a student/teacher/practitioner Awareness of feelings and emotions (self and others) Find a common space (bringing together) AD as a common space Make connections with self and others (breathing /telling your stories)	Values Doctoral studies –catalyst /metamorphosis /personal changes Raised awareness Spirituality –The Priest makes connections with self and others
2. What did we hope to achieve for ourselves /work in AD by incorporating CP? What were the benefits/effects of these practices for ourselves?	Space to pause and reflect Clarity of mind Responsiveness	Connecting my learning with my values and sense of meaning Well-being

3. How do you implement contemplative practices – self and others/work practice?	Sharing space Recognising the presence of self and others Use of music	Reflective practices Life-giver
4. How do contemplative practices shape personal /professional identities/practice	Transformation of the inner self Develop reflective techniques	Mindfulness

Discussion of Findings

After the second level of analysis (see Table 2), the themes that emerged were: connecting with self and others, connecting learning with values and well-being, and connecting reflection and learning, which we will now expand on.

Theme1: Connecting with self and others

> *"We were both on the same path. Our goal was student success. That was for certain after our conversation. We were ready to begin a journey on the path we were going to make and take."* (Author 2)

As we shared our stories, we believed that we each had our nature, limits, and potentials, which we learned to create together to obtain results. Our "work is relational, and its outcomes depend on what we can evoke from each other" (Palmer, 2004: 109). We worked together on an AD project at the university in 2012. The project was a curriculum revision of the university's qualifications to include a General Education component in the undergraduate programmes. During the project, we reflected on and wrestled with implementing various components of the General Education modules. Author 2 led the General Education project at the university, whilst Author 1 was a task team member. We later worked together on another General Education Project where we were team members developing the compulsory first-year module, which was called Cornerstone 101. Cornerstone 101 is a liberal education module and aims to develop adaptive graduates who are "critical and creative thinkers, who work independently and collaboratively, knowledgeable practitioners, effective communicators, culturally, environmentally and socially aware within a local and global context and active and reflective practitioners" (DUT, 2012: 2).

The Cornerstone 101 module task team was comprised of staff from across the university. *"… we wrestled with understanding of how we would introduce contemplative practices into the General Education modules and how to encourage staff to use contemplative pedagogy* (Author 2). As a team, we worked through our fears and apprehensions by listening carefully to each other and responding to each person's queries. The Cornerstone 101 is now a flagship module at the university, and research by Govender and Rathilal (2021) shows that students responded positively to the module and indicated that they experienced personal growth, were able to embrace positive relationships and developed life skills, communication skills and became more reflective in their practice.

Through connecting with others, we helped to create a safe community of practice amongst us as we forged relationships. We helped create a living and evolving community of creativity and compassion…[we] were drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world we are a part of (Palmer, 1993: 15).

Theme 2: Connecting learning with values and well-being

The AD practitioner has to be cognisant of the well-being of staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder that life is fragile and people face different challenges. The check-in sessions that some of us have been practising for years in AD proved to be a 'lifeline' to many staff who attended our AD sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. During these check-in sessions, staff shared their personal and professional challenges. Creating these sharing spaces within a professional development programme opened up other learning spaces for staff. Eloff and Graham (2020) opine that mental health and well-being are imperative to "long-term outcomes such as quality of life, physical health and longevity" (Eloff and Graham, 2020: 2).

> *"Acknowledging that we all come from different spaces into a common space is important. I believe that in HE, we sometimes forget that we are dealing with people who have different life experiences which impact them in different ways. Most sessions would begin with a check-in where staff would share their feelings and what was happening in their lives. Some shared about a sick parent, the pressures of work and life, and so on. This check-in was very important as it created a meshing and coming together of the members, thus creating a community*." (Author 1)

> *"I provided space and opportunity for the teachers to generate ideas, judging which felt right or worked best and refining the ideas as they tapped into their talents. As I interacted with academic staff in workshops that I facilitated to design and develop effective learning materials, I responded spontaneously to the presence of the staff in the workshop using my whole body. I do not consciously plan or set out to behave and respond in that manner. It happens spontaneously. I have now realised that I was engaging in the activation of whole-being-learning. "(*Author 2)

AD learning should be reciprocal because we view staff as equals and co-constructors in the learning process. AD work should use a bottom-up approach where the staff's needs are considered when planning AD activities. In this way, AD work will be dialogical. The principles of transformation and sustainability underpin our work as we strive to bring about change in our staff, students and the institution.

> ***"****The well-being of staff is sorely neglected in HE. CP allows us to SEE each other as people. Allowing moments of pausing allows for more reflection on what we are doing and why. It allows us also to seek new directions as we develop clarity of mind."* (Author 1)

Our relationships with staff must be ethical and transparent. In our practice, we place much emphasis on respecting lecturers as experts in their subject areas and viewing them as collaborators and co-constructors of knowledge. AD practice should also be axiological in that it is evidence-based, and both of us approach our work in a scholarly fashion as we constantly reflect on our practice and the effect of our initiatives so that they are current and relevant, thereby supporting thus becoming 'experts in their circumstances' (Devlin, 2006: 102). *"Contemplative practices have helped me to develop mindfulness. It has allowed me to be fully aware of others in the shared space and to be present. Contemplative practices provide spaces within academic development to allow us to pause as we reflect on our learning/practice. It has made me calmer, and I can respond to challenges in a mindful way "(*Author 1).

Theme 3: Connecting reflection and learning

On becoming AD practitioners, we found ourselves continually evolving as we began to step out of our comfort zones to attempt different types of practices with staff. We found that when staff embraced contemplative practices, it developed them into reflective practitioners, which impacted their teaching and, in turn, transformed educational practices. We also found that contemplative practices shape both the personal and the professional.

> *Contemplative practices are also changing who I am. It allows me to look beneath the surface and reflect on what is happening. This reflection opens me up to imagine new possibilities as I reflect in and on action" (*Author 1)

The contemplative practice that we engaged with as AD practitioners resonates with Schon's (1987) description of a "reflective practitioner "who is "the expert who is awake to, and aware of, their practice, not just immersed in it" (1987: 26). Schon further elaborates that the reflective practitioner must reflect – 'in-action' and also 'on-action'. This reflection must also be reflexive in that it leads to change in practice. By using contemplative practices, we provided a safe space for teaching staff to critique their values, beliefs, and practices and then take the necessary steps to change their practice. This reflection and practice change are reciprocal as we reflect on our practice and what we should change in the next staff development offering. This reflection and reflexivity should lead to a more critical interrogation by engaging in the scholarship of learning and teaching and by researching what the evidence points to. Contemplative pedagogies allow ADPs to be reflective and reflexive so that what we do is relevant and responsive. When we, as AD practitioners, provide this freedom, we "provide a theorised space for interrogating what it means to be an academic" (McKenna, 2012: 15).

In reflecting on our work and asking staff to also reflect on their teaching with supporting evidence, we found an improvement in the scholarship, which refers to the "quality of the way academic work is or should be done … [and] bringing specialist knowledge and skills to bear in doing the work" (Brew, 2010: 107). Scholarship is when academics and support staff reflect on their practice, take responsibility for inquiring into aspects of their practice and attempt to find solutions to the challenges they encounter. Academic developers must inspire and support teaching staff to question the practices within their disciplines. Brew suggests that teaching staff must be encouraged to "utilise academic skills of inquiry, to investigate the facts, to search the literature, to set up questions for investigation, to gather and examine the evidence in the light of theories and to disseminate what they find" (Brew, 2010: 113). "

Conclusion

Like Common (1989), we believe that "master teachers are not born; they become. They become primarily by developing a habit of mind, a way of looking critically at their work; by developing the courage to recognise faults, and struggling to improve" (Common, 1989: 385 in Leibowitz *et al*., 2009: 258). Both lecturing and AD work are not innate or common sense; they are things to be developed and nurtured. AD is a journey to be experienced in collaboration with others as the staff member and the AD practitioner share opportunities to value mindfulness, awareness, reflection and compassion. The journey, which is reflective and transformative, engages each person in identifying their values through reflecting continuously on their personal lived experiences, developing relationships and improving practice. Contemplative practices provide opportunities for identifying commonality and uniqueness in each person's values on their journey.

There needs to be an integration of values and well-being in HE spaces, as staff well-being must be prioritised. The implication for practice is that through contemplative practices, values such as creativity and compassion can be identified and lived out to promote life-giving energies needed for mental health during the post-COVID era. Creating safe spaces for staff to share personal and professional challenges fosters a supportive environment and enhances overall mental health and well-being. AD work should adopt a reciprocal approach where teaching staff are viewed as equals and co-constructors in the learning process. This involves considering the needs and perspectives of staff when planning AD activities, thus ensuring a dialogical approach to professional development. For contemplative practices to be effective, AD practitioners must maintain ethical and transparent relationships with teaching staff and respect them as experts during collaboration. As discussed in this paper, engaging in contemplative practices is crucial for AD practitioners and teachers as it contributes to improving their practice, leading to transformative educational practices. Contemplative practices are crucial in fostering mindfulness, reflection, and personal growth among ADPs and teaching staff. These practices create spaces for pause and reflection, leading to more mindful responses to challenges and opportunities. AD staff must engage in self-observation, self-reflection and self-analysis, ensuring alignment between the personal and the professional. The use of contemplative practices provides nuanced understandings of the role of place and space in evolving academic development in higher education—collaborative autoethnography coupled with contemplative pedagogies and practices provides insight into professional development, identity, and personal experience.

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