



Academic Development in the Tension between Responsibility and Accountability

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Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke
Department of Education and LINK, University of Oslo and visiting professor at Örebro University



Research on higher education in 2020



Tight 2020:

- A relatively young and expanding research field
 - A broad field and rich variation of research objects and methods (a lack of coherent theoretical framing?)
 - Dominance of social science approaches
 - Dominance of qualitative studies
- An increasing '(political) call' for more quantitative and big data (eg learning analytics)

A situation that opens up for new and innovative research – but where do we go?



Academic development a research field in motion?

From predominantly practice-based, often with a tone of 'giving advice' to a wider range of methodologies and theoretical underpinnings.... (Bolander Laksov & Huijser 2020)

A call for a wider, more 'holistic' conceptualization of academic development, the need for theoretical and conceptual contributions seems higher than ever before (Sutherland 2018)

...international recognition of the field may be achieved at the expense of diversity, recognition of difference and radically different terms and conditions in the working conditions of ADs, their roles and responsibilities Sugrue et al (2018)

Research on higher education in 2021 and beyond?

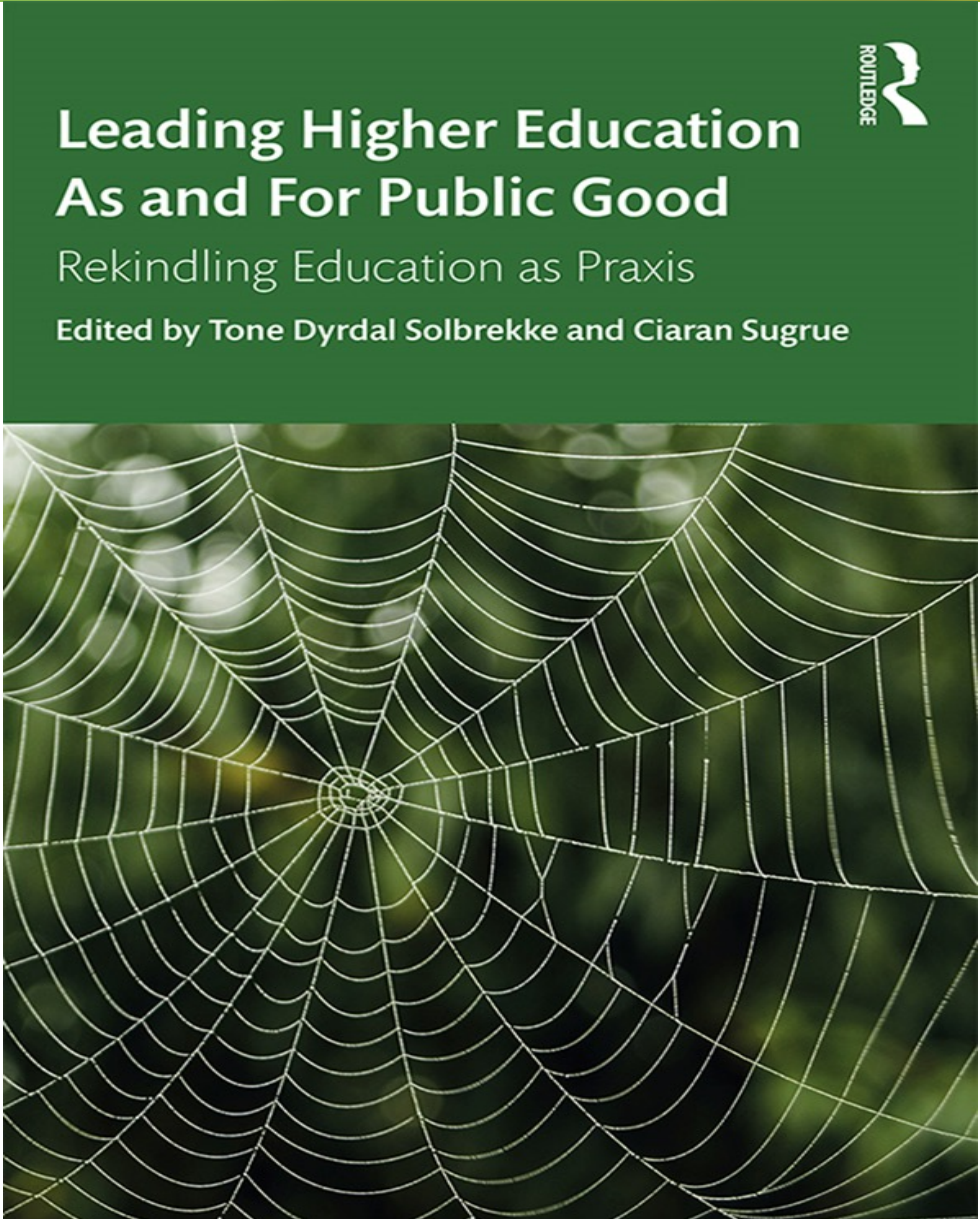
Geertsema & van der Rijst (2021)

What are we trying to achieve, and why?

What do we value as academic developers, and where can we make a difference?

In what directions do we lead higher education through our research and teaching/leading practices?

FORMATION and COMPETENCE BUILDING of UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS (2015-2020/21)



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



Leading Higher Education As and For Public Good

Rekindling Education as Praxis

Edited by Tone Dyrda Solbrenke and Ciaran Sugrue



- Higher Education as and for Public Good(s) (whatever that means)
- Core principles of Deliberative communication is a PG and may increase PG: let all voices be heard, respected and tolerated
- Leading is Teaching and Teaching is Leading
- Acceptance of 'the web of commitments' we all live and work within
- The need for negotiations to reach 'legitimate compromises'
- Ideals are necessary – yet hard to live out in practice – but worth trying



Trends in the practices of academic developers

Sugrue et al 2018

- From working with individual teachers' needs to increased pressure on 'mandatory' ('standardised?') courses
- Expanded roles and new responsibilities - 'institutional brokering'
- Increased pressure on transforming and digitalization of teaching and learning (intensified in the pandemic year)
- HE leaders increasingly turn to ADs in the development of institutional strategies regarding teaching, learning and assessment - and even educational leadership in order to demonstrate high quality education

Changing landscape and expanding roles



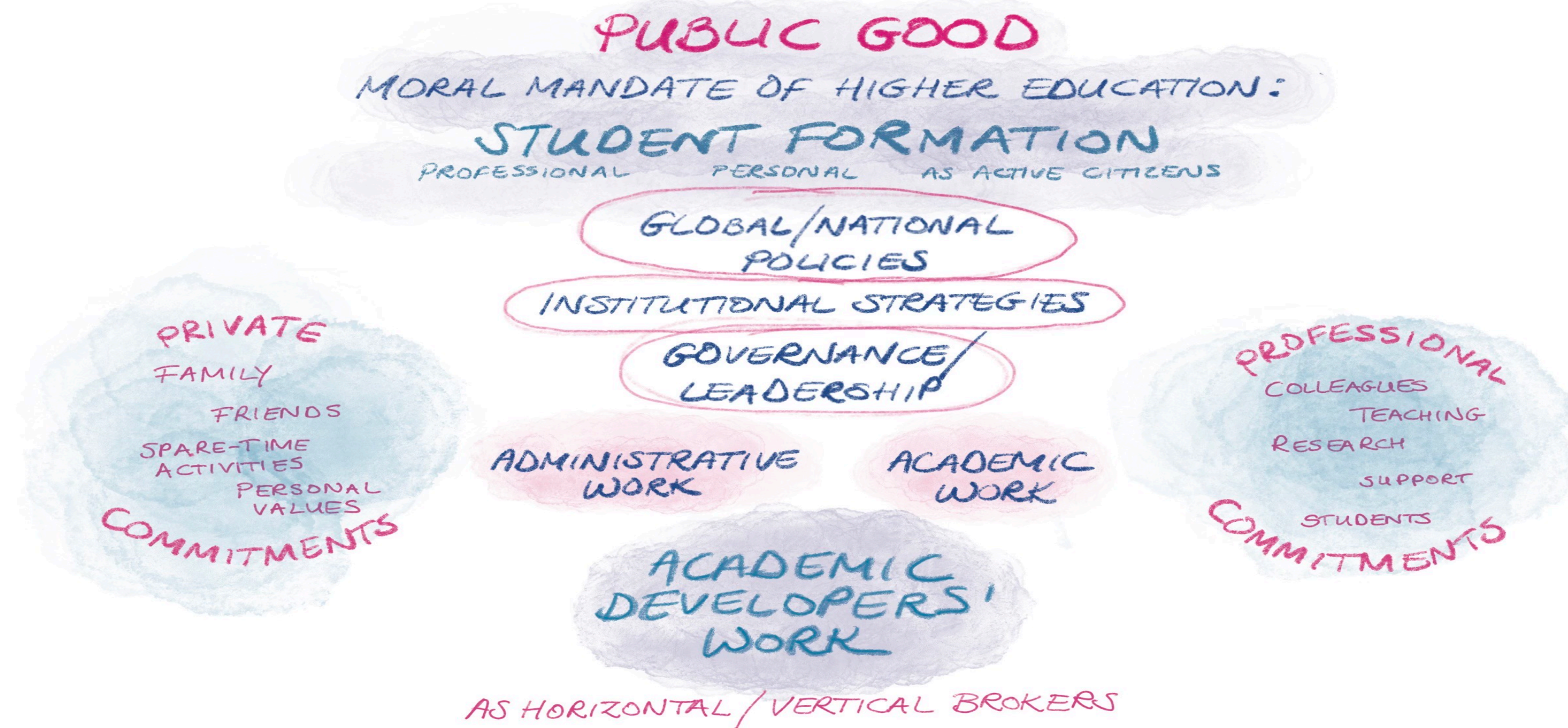
The last two and a half years, and **as part of the quality assurance system**, I have worked **closer and closer with the university leadership** and worked less and less as an academic developer. We have got **more and new assignments from the university....**This means **less contact with faculty staff** on the faculty level or department level. (Leader of Academic Development Unit, Uppsala, 2018)



Expanding roles → new relations....?

I am also the chair of the committee evaluating teachers. That is very hot at our university as we have got the meriting system for 'elite teachers.' (Leader of Academic Development unit, Örebro, 2018)

ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS' RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEXT A WEB OF COMMITMENTS



Responsibility and accountability: key synonyms

Thesaurus Digital Library:

Responsibility: trustworthiness, capacity, dependability and reliability, trust, capability, judgement and choice

→ a moral obligation to take responsibility

Accountability: answerability, obligation, liability,

→ the duty to account for one's actions to others

Logics and tensions between responsibility and accountability



Responsibility

- based in academic/professional mandate
- situated judgement
- trust
- moral and academic rationale
- internal evaluation
- negotiated standards
- implicit language
- framed by professions
- relative autonomy and personally inescapable
- PROACTIVE

Accountability

- defined by current governance
- standardised by contract
- control
- economic/legal rationale
- external auditing
- predetermined indicators
- transparent language
- framed by political goals
- compliance with employer's/politicians' decisions
- REACTIVE

RESPONSIBILITY

**MORAL and ACADEMIC
/EPISTEMIC
PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE**

**PROFESSIONAL
DISCRETION**

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

**ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AS
NEGOTIATED LEGITIMATE
COMPROMISES IN THE TENSION
BETWEEN THE TWO DIFFERENT
LOGICS**

ACCOUNTABILITY

**ECONOMIC and LEGAL
RATIONALE**

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

In the tension

Henriksen et al. 2021:

One academic development leader mainly points to “the formal **obligations and commitments come from the top management** of the university”, but s/he also adds: “Otherwise **I have tried to keep my ear to the rails and listen to both teachers and students.**”

(Sweden, 6)

An example from the project – the intention:



Leading a process in a university pedagogy course using deliberative communication to engage participants in critical reflection on the use of 'constructive alignment' as a pedagogical model --- yet also how it has become a political steering means.....

The Experience - and reflection

“What ‘critical friends’ helped me realize during the post-conversation, is how easy you fall into the role of lecturing and ‘provide answers’ rather than initiate deliberations among the participants... partly due to the explicit expectations from the participants, as well as from the university management, that the academics would learn tools to develop ‘good teaching’”

Some 'statements' on the role of AD/academic developers in higher education for public good



Ron Barnett's:

- The university as a set of public spaces and its members as citizens requires leadership and the orchestration of debate - 'deliberative communication' - reflexivity
- Academic developers must lead 'up' not only 'across' and find a way of speaking constructively to senior managers
- Far from easy - But, I fear, that that's how matters are

Peter Felten's ...and others':

- Liberating teachers, students, and everyone involved in teaching and learning in higher education" (Felten et al.,2019)
- An important leadership responsibility for ADs is to promote 'sustainability' particularly in circumstances where initiative overload is counter-productive (Sugrue et al. 2018)



A responsibility to 'raise our voices' as horizontal and vertical brokers?

Legitimate resistance OR Legitimate compliance

Legitimate compromise?

Nobody is perfect,
but a team can be...

Some references



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