

Poems and pedagogic frailty: uncovering the affective within teacher development through collective biography

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Abstract

To explore the affective domains embedded in academic development and teacher practice, a team of academic developers was invited to consider a poem and how it reflects the emotions and feelings underpinning experiences as teachers within Higher Education. We used a method of arts-informed, collective biography to evaluate a poem to draw upon and share memories to interrogate lived experiences. Our research is framed using the lens of pedagogic frailty model to see how affective and discursive encounters are produced and impact us. We contend that collective arts-based and biographical approaches can provide alternative ways for ourselves and teachers to examine their own pedagogic frailty.

Keywords

Arts-based methods, affective dimension, pedagogic health, emotions

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Introduction

This paper reports on the activities of a team of academic developers as they adopted an arts-based, collective biography approach to examine the affective dimensions that colour the day-to-day lived experiences of the team. This study followed from a team activity exploring a poem about HE learning and teaching. Each team member was invited to reflect upon the significance of the affective dimensions of their work as represented by verses within the poem. We hoped that our shared interest of exploring affect would help us to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the values that inform our practice as academic developers. In turn, we wanted to explore how this influences the ways we interact with the HE teachers who undertake academic development work with us as part of our commitment to researcher-led academic development (Kinchin et al., 2018). Following on from Kinchin et al.'s study which highlighted the importance of a shared 'horizontal discourse' (as explored by Bernstein, 1999) by explicating shared values, we felt the collaborative activity of a joint paper to explore affective dimensions could help us to examine how this informs academic development more broadly.

Drawing on our understanding of the affective literature and reflecting on our lived experiences in HE through arts-based approaches, we created a dialogue to bring our subjective and collective experiences together to examine 'pedagogic frailty' (Kinchin, 2015) in our development work, with the hope of moving practice in new directions towards a closer state of 'pedagogic health' (Kinchin, 2019). Not only does this help us enhance our own practice, but we argue this could be undertaken by any HE teacher to help them better situate their own pedagogic frailty and make connections with their own teaching practice. Whilst previous explorations of pedagogic frailty have been noted to elicit emotional responses from research participants (Kinchin et al., 2016), studies have typically focussed on the behavioural and cognitive aspects that influence university academics' professional activity and development (e.g. Kinchin and Winstone, 2017); leaving the affective dimensions underexplored.

We begin this paper by outlining literature that considers affective domains of HE learning and teaching to situate our research contribution. We argue research regarding affect of academic development work is in its infancy despite its centrality to HE learning and teaching. We then outline our methodology of adopting an arts-based 'collective biography' approach (Davies and Gannon, 2006). This entailed a team member (IMK) initially adapting a poem related to learning and teaching to encourage engagement with affective dimensions. This was then discussed as a collective. We contend that this approach offers a valuable way to surface rich emotional and relational aspects encountered in practice. Thus, the following question underpins this study: What affective dimensions influence academic developers and how does this inform their teacher development work?

Affect in HE learning and teaching

Whilst there is existing research on emotions amongst students and teachers in school settings, there is a lack of research in post-secondary and HE contexts (Lincoln and

Kearney 2019). Quinlan (2016a) argues that affective research in HE offers a balance to recent narratives focused on marketisation, learning outcomes and learning gains. Mendzheritskaya and Hansen (2019) argue that the context of adult learning varies considerably; therefore, it is important to address this research gap of the affective in HE learning and teaching. Where there is research of the affective domain in HE, it is mostly geared around students' emotions (Hagenauer and Volet 2014). Moreover, much of this research into students' emotions in learning is often unacknowledged and is under- or mis-theorised (Beard et al., 2007).

Research of emotions amongst university teachers is often focussed upon professional experiences and wellbeing including factors like stress and burnout contributing towards 'emotional exhaustion' (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014: 242). Similarly, Kolomitro et al. (2020) have explored issues like stress, burnout and wellbeing specifically amongst educational developers. More recent research however has begun to explore teachers' emotions with respect to their perceptions of teaching. For example, Quinlan (2019) uses poetic inquiry to explore moral concerns embedded in the emotional experiences of HE teachers, how this plays out in practice and how it can support their future development. Stupinsky et al. (2019) explored the discrete, but common, emotions of enjoyment, anxiety and boredom experienced by academics during teaching and research, and how this influences their work. Cunningham and Mills (2020) examine their lived experiences as academic developers to explore teaching identities in HE, and like us, argue that poetry can encourage a deeper dialogue with ourselves and others to enhance our own learning and critical awareness around teaching. However, there is still little research exploring the range of emotions through lived experiences that academic developers and HE teachers experience in relation to professional teacher practice. Thinking about the wider implications of this study, we highlight Lincoln and Kearney's (2019: 1707) argument that '...the emotions debate is part of a global reflection on how a decent society is to be defined in the 21st century' and that understanding emotions can reveal insight into issues like happiness, economic security, work-life balance, etc. Specifically, understanding affective dimensions can reveal how emotions impact on the university environment and pedagogical processes: 'Thus, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes in HE as well as the wellbeing of the actors involved, a deeper understanding is needed of the underlying emotional processes of HE teaching and learning' (Menzheritskaya and Hansen, 2019: 1709). Therefore, we feel that an exploration of affect in relation to academic development work can offer valuable contributions to both academic development and the wider HE sector.

We also identified through our literature review that existing research of affect typically adopts 'traditional' qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) used qualitative in-depth interviews with teachers to explore their emotions in student-teacher interactions in a longitudinal context. Lindblom-Ylänne (2019) notes that recent research of academics' emotions in university contexts frequently use questionnaires. Whilst these studies offer valuable insight into the affective domain of HE teachers, we acknowledge Lincoln and Kearney's (2019: 1707) point that 'Studying emotions is a complex phenomenon

[...] requiring a wide range of research methods (both conventional and experimental) ...'. Responding to this call, in the next section of this paper, we explain the arts-based methodological approach underpinning our study and outline its value in examining affect in academic development.

The arts-based collective biography approach

Mirroring the lack of research on the affective domain, [Burge et al. \(2016\)](#) notes that whilst arts-based practices and research approaches are evident in educational settings like schools, they are less common in HE. [Quinlan \(2016a\)](#) also asserts that arts-based methodologies are useful in examining intangible dimensions of HE learning and teaching, including emotions. Nonetheless, [Manathunga et al. \(2017\)](#) highlight a growing trend internationally towards using visual and creative methods in HE research, particularly in relation to identity work with students and teachers. In our review of the literature of affective dimensions of learning and teaching, we share [Pithouse-Morgan et al.'s \(2014, 2017\)](#) view that poetic inquiry as an arts-based approach, including both the generation and analysis of poems, are becoming increasingly recognised by researchers as an effective medium for producing evocative and reflexive accounts of learning and teaching. The main forms of poetic inquiry evident in the literature, which mostly entails the production of poems relating to affective dimensions include 'poetic representation' (e.g., [Hopper and Sanford, 2008](#)), 'found poems' (e.g., [Reilly, 2013](#); [Pithouse-Morgan 2016](#)), or forms of 'poetic transcription' (e.g., [Jones 2010](#); [Smart and Loads, 2017](#)). These forms of poetic inquiry offer new ways of inviting researchers and participants to interpret their experiences and emotions encountered in teaching ([Quinlan 2016b, 2019](#)). Moreover, the production and analysis of poetry, which can be conducted individually or collectively, can result in co-constructed understandings that invites researchers/participants and the reader to reflect on the emotional experiences encountered in teaching and/or learning ([Hopper and Sanford, 2008](#)). Poems can also encourage us to reflect upon how teaching is conceptualised and shaped by external influences, e.g., prior experiences, disciplinary culture, institutional ethos, etc. ([Jones, 2010](#)) and inspire us to think about our ongoing journeys of professional development ([Pithouse-Morgan, 2016](#)). In this way, poems offer a way of prompting critical discussions with others about development and practice.

In this study we took a poem and responded to it using a collective biography ([Davies and Gannon, 2006](#)), where participants are encouraged to write and reflect on 'moments of being'. The collective biography 'offers a flexible, generative and creative approach to interrogating lived experience and the formation of subjectivities' ([Gannon et al., 2019: 49](#)) and is interested in the in-between moments and spaces of academic life: 'the contemplative moments where something else, something surprising, can come to the surface and disrupt our thinking-as-usual' ([Davies and Gannon, 2006: 2](#)). In collective biography, a group of researchers work together to consider a topic, drawing upon memories and experiences of the topic through discussion and writing ([Davies and Gannon, 2006](#)).

In the current study, we as a ‘collective’ (i.e. the authors of this paper who are academic developers teaching on the same HE teacher development programme) adopted an arts-based approach by responding to a poem. This poem was selected because of the relevance to the work of academic developers and concerns about pedagogic frailty and health within the sector (e.g., conflicts between achieving teaching excellence and research excellence). In this study, however, we deviated from other forms of poetic inquiry and collective biography because we chose to use a poem as a stimulus to generate discussion and co-produce dialogic reflections informed by poetry. The poem provided us with a starting point for discussion that encouraged a reflective approach that did not look for a naturalistic truth but explored how creative texts might ‘give ‘voice’ to academics’ values, pleasures and pains at a time when those who determine university policies are no longer capable of, or interested in hearing us’ (Manathunga et al., 2017: 527).

The activity was introduced by exploring a variant of a poem by Mary Boyle, ‘The Invitation’ (2016), which was modified by one of the authors of this paper to include the language of ‘pedagogic frailty’ (Kinchin et al., 2016), rather than the original context of medical education (see Figure 1). Permission for adapting and reproducing the poem was provided by Boyle. Consideration of this poem was initiated through a workshop led by one of the authors (IMK) which set the agenda for our collective reflection on the processes of academic development by acknowledging the insecurities and stresses felt by teachers (verse 1); introducing elements of the teaching certificate programme like teaching observations (verse 2); acknowledging how scholarship of teaching might be ranked by participants below ‘survival’ (verse 3); the scepticism of colleagues about academic development courses (verse 4), turning the certificate programme on its head by referring to tutors learning from the programme participants (verse 5), emphasising the need for constructive dialogue (verses 6 and 7). This poem was chosen specifically for this task. Not because of any poetic quality, or because it was written by a famous poet, but because it helped to focus on the key issues of pedagogic frailty. The poem shares a provenance with the concept of pedagogic frailty, with its origins in the clinical literature, and with a few minor modifications (approved by the poet) it provides several potential points of contact for reflection upon teaching in the university to invite further discussion.

Following this, we were all invited to produce an individual written response to a verse which resonated with our emotions and experiences as academic developers. This led to all verses in the poem being explored and reflections being shared, bringing forth a collective dialogue about affect in our academic development work. Following this, we turned our attention to undertaking analysis of our reflections keeping in mind some of the literature on affect to explore the affective dimensions encountered in our roles and the implications for our practice.

Within this paper there is a balance to be struck between ‘*imposing* an analysis of the participants’ views’, that may result in closing down the ongoing professional conversation and give the appearance of settling on a ‘*correct* interpretation’, and on the other hand using the participants’ responses to invite connections to be made (lines of articulation, *sensu* Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and invite the reader to invigorate lines as they read the text and seek out resonance with their own contexts. We also need to acknowledge the participants’ narratives as contours in their continuous pathways of

THE INVITATION

1. We asked you to come and you did.
We saw you anxious and tense.
Juggling teaching, marking, research and family.
We saw up close how stress might shape us.
 2. We wondered if we could visit you and let us come in
We observed you keen to master teaching,
Coping with efficiency savings and cuts in budgets.
We learned how managerialism might try to take us.
 3. We asked if you would come and sit with us and you did.
We saw bags under your eyes and weights on your shoulders.
We learned how, in fatigue, scholarship might escape us.
 4. We asked if you would join our teacher development session and you came.
We saw the doubts in your mind and your energy draining.
We saw how deeper trouble signs its name.
 5. We saw a few things, but learned much more,
When your eyes met ours.
We learned how your whole life had changed,
And we suddenly felt like we knew you for a long time.
 6. As you speak out from the shadow of frailty, you are our best teacher.
From there you bend our insight and swell our knowledge,
Restore our feeling of compassion,
And colour the depth of our understanding.
 7. Because we met you
And you told us your story
We can learn
We can remember,
We have greater purpose to study so hard.
- Thank you for accepting our invitation.

Figure 1. Based on 'The Invitation' by Mary Boyle. (verses numbered 1–7 for ease of reference within the text).

becoming rather than as fixed points that need to be classified into themes that would invite colleagues to be ‘catalogued and classified’ as if they were museum specimens. Our approach here reflects the concerns expressed by Peters et al. (2022: 871) that strict adherence to certain publishing conventions can ‘drain every last drop of creativity from academic writing’, and may intimidate participants, discouraging them from further participation in reflective scholarship. By offering extended extracts of the participants’ voices, we hope to avoid any dilution of creativity and to maintain the diversity of voices that have been uncovered by this process.

The key themes then that emerged from our reflections include: acknowledgement of the backdrop of pedagogic frailty operating in HE and sensitivity towards it by academic developers; the centrality of empathy and compassion in academic development; and the importance of safe spaces for dialogue to support teacher development.

Reflections

The group of authors reflected on verses within the poem and described feelings or critical incidents it evoked. One colleague recalls an incident early in her career as an academic developer showing the importance of pastoral care prompted by her reading of verse 1:

During my work with one group, it hit me: just because our ‘students’ are staff, pastoral care is part of our role. We had a tutorial, and they were working on their presentation. The tutorial was productive, and by the end of the session they had a working version of their presentation. At the end of the tutorial, one participant took her time packing up her things, and after the other members had left, she burst into tears.

Whilst working with undergraduates, I cannot count the times I had students in tears, almost hyperventilating sometimes. I never expected to experience this with staff. Quite simply, the participant was overwhelmed. The job was tough, the workload intense, and the pressure to capture grants and gain 4* papers was omnipresent. We stayed in the room for two hours, and she poured out her insecurities about her role as an academic. Lines in the first verse instantly reminded me of this encounter.

In that moment, not only did I see myself in the role of personal tutor, supporting undergraduates, I saw myself as an early-career lecturer, struggling, but never feeling I could share that with people in my department because it might reveal weakness in an environment where the rhetoric was always ‘not quite good enough’. Instead, my emotions came out to those beyond the boundaries of my department, just as this participant did to me. I felt privileged that she felt she could share her anxieties with me. This was a threshold moment – I realised that our participants are in many ways similar to students, and that there is an important role for us as academic developers to build participants’ self-efficacy and offer a safe space for sharing the challenges of an academic role.

This reflection shows an awareness by the academic developer of pressures upon teachers, like balancing the research-teaching nexus, an area often cited as a source

of pedagogic frailty (Kinchin et al., 2016). Here empathy and compassion towards colleagues is apparent which may originate from, like many academic developers, having taught in other disciplinary areas prior to moving into academic development (Green and Little, 2016), or balancing this nexus ourselves in researcher-led academic development roles (Kinchin et al., 2018). This shows that pastoral care towards teachers should be an important feature of academic development and with that comes a strong feeling of privilege of creating a safe space where teachers feel they can confide in us outside of the pressures encountered in their own departments.

Another colleague was reminded of an experience resonating with Verse 2, prompted reflections of a personal experience:

This resonates with me because I see our participants wanting to become better teachers, but struggling with the administration placed on them. The time required for them to reflect about their teaching is limited and the only time they get to do it in a meaningful way, is when they stop, make space and think about it with us through conversation. In those conversations, I recognise pressures they face, with some trying to get a teaching assistant to help them mark over 300 essays (but worried about giving control and diminishing the quality of marking by doing so). We can pretend and give them advice about how to adapt and try different things to make learning an individual experience. But with those numbers it would be difficult to get to know even 20 students well.

This reflection shows the importance of empathy within academic development (Timmermans and Sutherland, 2020), formed through shared feelings like burden and frustration alongside colleagues, often stemming from mutual concerns about administration encountered in teaching for example.

Although the reflections showed shared feelings and experiences of empathy, in verse 3 one colleague is struck by the implications of isolation felt amongst academic peers:

What struck me within this poem is the binary juxtaposition of 'we' and 'you'. This poetic device helps to position the subject of the poem (the 'you') in opposition to the multiple 'we' creating a heightened sense of the isolation of this teacher. This reminded me of how lonely teaching can be for some who lack supportive departmental cultures and who are under pressures but don't have anyone to share these with. This verse highlights the isolation of this individual 'we asked if you would come and sit with us'.

I have noticed that our academic developer role seems to be more counsellor and friend than I expected as many colleagues look to us to offer support they may not be able to access within their departments. I think this is a positive contribution that we can make, although at times it can be difficult.

Through appreciating issues like loneliness experienced by some teachers in their teaching journeys which can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014), this individual suggests that academic developers can help alleviate such feelings through an emerging sense of mutual friendship. However, this friendship can be both

rewarding and challenging for academic developers as interactions can be emotionally loaded.

Continuing upon similar vein as some of the previous reflections, there was a focus upon an age of uncertainty stimulated by verse 4:

This verse suggests the challenge of academic development that I have in part been responsible for developing and delivering for a long time. I have often thought that wherever I am positioned in my thinking I am ever striving off for some place beyond the horizon, seeking, where I can, new questions. This creates uncertainty for those who come to sessions in all good faith seeking an answer and initially provides just doubt which I see expressed across the classroom in front on me. I wonder therefore that the self I have always inhabited as a teacher, very different from the one I wear elsewhere away from the university, has become ever more a caricature? Does it really help those who are already feeling a significant burden, who want to do the best they can, or does it further drain them as I invite them on a journey for which they have few provisions? I wonder these days if I have perhaps enjoyed creating the doubt, using it to drain their energy, and then fill it with notions that lack substance against the backdrop of a system that I sneer at and yet they are nestled within?

This thinking evokes feelings of potential conflict, underpinned by a desire to create levels of uncertainty by asking critical questions about pedagogy to support teachers to transform their teaching, whilst remaining mindful that in doing so can potentially contribute towards pedagogic frailty. Therefore, academic developers can experience a balancing act between encouraging high standards and being supportive to help teachers develop and learn (Timmermans and Sutherland, 2020).

Regarding '*We saw the doubts in your mind*', another colleague reflects on verse 4:

This reminds me of a conversation we had in one of my tutor groups about ideas around active learning and student engagement, and the frustrations my tutee-colleagues, mostly new lecturers, felt about the student numbers and the expectations around MEQ [Module Evaluation Questionnaire] scores, neither factors being conducive to trying out something innovative and 'risky'. They wanted to try something new but had 'doubts' about implementing their ideas and did not feel that institutional systems were set up to support their innovative pedagogical endeavours.

Building on the previous thoughts, this response acknowledges how teachers can experience worries about the unpredictable nature of teaching (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014) which may lead to risk-aversion under the precarious culture, contracts and systems of HE. Therefore, reciprocated feelings and experiences of trust is central in academic development to create transparent and constructive dialogue as well as create safe space for teachers to push boundaries in their pedagogic practice.

Furthering ideas about trust and friendship, triggered a sense of academic community in verse 4:

I like the use of the pronoun ‘we’ throughout the poem as it gives a sense of community and inclusivity. I’m not sure who the writer is, at some points I feel it is a student, but then the line “We asked if you would join our teacher development session and you came” leads me to think that the writer is a teacher educator, or academic developer. It probably doesn’t matter who the writer is – weaving between student and academic developer, the words evoking an image of a teacher who is burdened by the weight of their workload but determined to do their best and committed to their job. The honesty of the teacher in acknowledging the stress of managing different roles (parent, teacher, scholar) is humbling. The poem evokes a survivor, despite the frailty, someone who will win through, who, through their own authenticity, will be the “best teacher”.

This brings together themes from latter extracts reinforcing that feelings of empathy, compassion, friendship and trust in academic development work can help break down potential barriers between colleagues. This has the capacity to contribute towards a sense of academic community through the development of authentic relationships where individuals can engage in dialogic and meaningful ways (Gravett and Winstone, 2020).

Verse 5 encourages the linking of the poem with ideas presented in literature linked to concepts of alliance:

[Bowen et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Telio et al. \(2015, 2016\)](#) write about the ‘educational alliance’ in the context of medical education. I feel this is very relevant to our work in academic development and was recalled when reading the poem.

Here this colleague purports that the construct of an educational alliance underpinned by joint understanding about the purpose of goals and relationships, shared contribution towards activities and mutual feelings of trust ([Telio et al., 2016](#)) is mirrored and experienced in academic development work. This reaffirms a desire to develop an academic community underpinned by solidarity experienced through an educational alliance.

Further thoughts were stimulated by verses 5 and 6:

‘We... learnt much more, when your eyes met ours’... This reminds us that a personal connection in teaching is more important than a suite of trendy pedagogical techniques or a profound knowledge of the material and latest development in the field. The realisation that somebody cares about you as a person, is prepared to listen, and is there to help you flourish, makes a huge difference. It is also a reminder that teaching is learning - learning about our students, our subject matter and how to help others make sense of it, and learning about ourselves when faced with unexpected situations and new challenges. The best teacher is somebody who helps you ask the right questions, and the students who engage and push their, as well as our, boundaries by questioning and enquiring, are indeed ‘our best teacher’.

This emphasises the importance of care and connection that should be at the heart of teaching and teacher development work. This returns to an earlier reflection about building ‘participants’ self-efficacy and confidence’ through personal connection and through genuine care towards individuals. This reflection also develops the idea that

teaching is primarily about *learning* – both encouraging and making learning happen in others, as well as constantly learning ourselves, as professionals, teachers and researchers. Ultimately, both teachers and students, or in our case, academic developers, are all involved in the ‘activity of advanced learning’ (Griffiths 2004: 721). It is through mutual respect towards colleagues and peers that academic developers can develop themselves.

Verse 6 stirs feelings of a shared experience reaffirming how trust and the creation of a safe pedagogic space is essential:

This is the most poignant of the poem’s verses for me as it combines the affective dimension and mutual benefits of involvement in learning and teaching. The verse is reflective of both our participants’ experiences as well as my own. The frailness of my academic identity and emotions that encircle that are reflected in my tutees’ experiences, where the boundary between teacher and taught blurs. I am both a teacher and a student, learning just as much from the staff that I work with as I teach. My tutees are teachers who are temporarily flung back into the realm of student (sometimes willingly, sometimes not), where we take them on a journey of self-discovery and self-reflection. That journey encourages the critique of entrenched disciplinary attitudes and practices underpinning already fragile academic identities. It supports the questioning of often assumed convention, requiring careful scaffolding and support.

This comment highlights emotions experienced in academic development can emanate from a shared sense of vulnerability and empathy grounded in the fragility of moving from the safety of the known (i.e. disciplinary conventions), to the self-inflicted precariousness of challenging these conventions and critiquing the values upon which they rest.

The value of social relations, identity and biography is noted within a reflection on verse 7:

This verse tells me that the most important aspect of teacher learning is the conversations we have with people. When we hear real stories, we learn so much about teaching, more than reading about it through academic papers or handbooks. The opportunity for sharing goes both ways. The storyteller gets to share, is valued, and confirms their identity, but at the same time, learns themselves by telling the story. Verbal thinking can be seen in the articulation of stories, and they generate meaning for the teller, through the telling. At the same time, listeners learn by making connections with their experiences of teaching and learning. Oral story telling is central to many cultures and creates community and relationships. My learning from this verse is to remember to encourage more storytelling as academic developer and encourage teachers to look for meaning in their stories.

The central role of talking and interaction are viewed as the means to build, develop and maintain social relations which value the person in teacher development work. This colleague describes the power of stories to make personal connections to the teacher, and meaningful connections to the discipline. Through stories a community can be established

and strengthen in which both students and teachers feel their voice is heard and their backgrounds are relevant.

Consideration of the poem in its entirety provoked the comment that:

The poem made me think about my own experience as a new lecturer when I approached my departmental mentor about my own difficulties ‘Juggling teaching, marking, research and family’. Her response was along the lines of ‘well, you just need to put up with it in your first year like everyone does and it will probably get even worse next year’. It was the exact opposite of what I needed to hear; I wanted *compassion* and some kind of sense of how to get through it.

This underscores how academic development is about more than professional development. As suggested by Sutherland (2018: 270), it should adopt a more holistic approach that pays ‘attention to the whole of the academic role, the whole institution, and the whole person.’ In this way, it may enable academic developers to feel that their work is valued, recognised and supported (Kolomitro et al., 2020), so that they in turn can offer support to help new and experienced teachers to also feel valued, despite the backdrop of efficiency savings and cuts in budgets etc. that can bring out feelings of frailty.

Conclusions

The arts-based collective biographical approach applied in this study inspired us to examine ourselves, our roles and practice as academic developers in new and exciting ways. The poem acted as a stimulus enabling us to articulate personal responses to the affective domains operating within academic development work, an area which is underexplored. Like other researchers endorsing arts-based approaches, we purport that such methods can assist all teachers to reflexively engage with the complexities of lived experience and emotions that we encounter and influence us in HE.

Individually, we unpacked feelings, emotions, and experiences at play within our work. This awareness helped us to further interrogate how they shape our practice and relationships with others, which we argue could be useful for all HE teachers. Collectively, we established common ground and difference in our lived experiences and emotions, helping us to see beyond our own individual biographies. The sharing of perspectives within this team is not intended to reductively channel or streamline our views into a single shared voice. On the contrary, we are keen to explore difference and diversity in the academic team and to help each other to appreciate our rich disciplinary heritages and the variety of professional experiences we possess to generate a range of assets that can be drawn upon within our work. This approach resonates with the emerging notion of refractive (rather than reflective) practice (Lambert, 2021). By exploring this here using poetry, we offer a balance to some of the more cognitive approaches that we have undertaken previously to support dialogue within the team (e.g. Kinchin et al., 2018), and to explore the nature of pedagogic frailty across the campus (e.g. Kinchin and Winstone, 2018). This foray into poetry

provides another dimension to our understanding of the teaching assemblage that contributes to our understanding of the ‘institutional natural history’, as described by Kinchin (2022). This also enabled us to draw out the unspoken amongst ourselves and others to produce deeper shared understandings, and develop closer team relations, which shapes our collective work going forwards. This aligns with Gannon et al. (2019: 54), who states, ‘although the collective is (perhaps) temporary, the practice and affect, for some of us at least, will be carried forward, changing, in subtle ways, how we think about our work lives.’

Through our reflections, we identified key emotions, experiences and relations shaping our academic development work. We discovered that our work is underpinned by empathy and compassion towards teachers, against our awareness of a backdrop of pedagogic frailty operating across HE. These qualities appear to be valued by teachers, which in turn can create mutual levels of trust where open dialogue and safe pedagogic spaces can begin to form. We believe these activities can have a positive impact on teacher’s development as they can feel more confident to discuss challenge and look to transform their pedagogic practice, which together can create a stronger sense of academic community. Like Roxå and Mårtensson (2009), we found that degrees of friendship can occur amongst academic developers and teachers, attributed by mutual feelings and experiences of trust. With this trust, stronger significant relationships can develop (Roxå and Mårtensson, 2015). However, as noted from several reflections, these relations can also create a burden for academic developers because we can take on some pressures and frustrations experienced by our colleagues. Thus, our reflections align with Leibowitz’s (2014: 359) view of academic development, which is ‘about the creation of conditions supportive of teaching and learning’. We argue that we need to create these conditions for ourselves and our colleagues, and that our exploration of the affective domains within academic development helps bring us closer to understanding how to do this. Moreover, by reflecting critically upon ‘the support we provide, [and] the development we offer’, through this creative arts-based collective biography study we hope to have contributed towards a more ‘holistic’ understanding of academic development (Sutherland, 2018: 261) through exploring the underexplored area of affect in academic development.

Thus, we invite academic developers to consider the capacity of art-based approach to in enabling them to reflect individually and collectively upon the affective domains encountered within their work to unpack the underexplored importance of emotions, feelings, values, motivations and attitudes that influences not only our teacher development work but our own states of pedagogic frailty or pedagogic health within academic development. Moreover, by encouraging the wider academic development community as well as the teachers with whom we work with to engage in these debates with us, we can identify wider shared emotions that have the potential to positively shape our academic development work and strengthen our relationships with teachers. In turn, this could have a positive influence in shaping teacher development and pedagogic practice.

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