From the administration into a discipline: Hazards in the institutional re-classification of a SoTL-community of academic developers. Building an academic field of professional inquiry?

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ABSTRACT: Units for academic development (ADUs) are installed at most universities. However, the institutional scaffolding of their activities seem to vary more than the content of their endeavors, as they are framed by a well witnessed complexity (Gosling 2009, Stigmar & Edgren 2014). In many cases, taking on a career as an academic developer is to proceed into a blind alley, compared to other academic paths. Since Boyer (1990) and the start of the SOTL movement, many ADUs have embraced SoTL as their mission. Such ADUs may work as communities of practice (Wenger 1998) with the development of SoTL as their joint enterprise, regardless of the variation in organisational circumstances. The latter, however, to a large extent also decide the conditions for the institutional positions from which SoTL-activities may be perceived and accomplished. This presentation displays a case-study of the transformation of an ADU from being a unit the central administration to become a special division in a department educational sciences. Academic developers recruited from a variety of disciplines and employed as administrative staff, were tried against new criteria for their educational qualifications and given academic positions in "higher education development". Social practice theory and Boyer?s conception of the academic profession is used to interpret the passage at two levels: First, the implications of the shift of context for the SoTL-community, moving their joint enterprise from one institutional complexity to another: Free at last or locked in syndrome? Second, an analysis of how the features of the new career path may delineate a new species of SoTL-academics. The discussion focusses on assets and privileges both gained and lost in comparisons with the previous culture for academic development, and, though strong convictions of necessity in the SoTL-community in question, the obvious hazards of including academic development in the academic profession under its present conditions.

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