

## **From affirmative to transformative approaches to academic development**

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## **From affirmative to transformative approaches to academic development**

### **Abstract**

Much academic development work, whether it be student, academic staff, institutional or curriculum development, is undertaken from an affirmative rather than a transformative approach (Lockett and Shay 2020). To be transformative, academic development has to reframe the problem beyond one of poor student retention and throughput. We need to make sense of the conditions from which issues such as poor retention and throughput rates emerge, rather than focusing on mitigating the effects of such conditions within the status quo. Drawing on Fraser's concept of parity of participation, we suggest that if academic development is to engage in transformative approaches, it needs to adjust the scale of the problem and challenge underpinning assumptions, and thereby review the fitness of universities, curricula and academic development practices for a pluralist society. In sum, a transformative approach to academic development work will entail conceptualising academic development as a political knowledge project.

### **Keywords**

parity of participation, academic development, social justice, affirmative, transformative, neoliberal

### **Introduction**

Academic development (AD) is a complex and diverse field which focuses on the professionalisation of teaching in higher education, the integration of educational technologies in teaching and learning, the development of curricula, and initiatives aimed at supporting students, as well as research into various aspects of higher education. In the last couple of decades, policy development and contributing to quality assurance processes have become part of this growing field.

We write from within the South African university system, which has not overcome the deleterious effects of its colonial and apartheid history. The system remains highly unequal with the patterns of student success and failure skewed along the lines of race and social class. South Africa has persistently