

Seen and heard: what role can learning development play in LGBTQ+ inclusion?

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Presentation abstract

An inclusive approach to teaching LGBTQ+ students in university is vital. LGBTQ+ people are more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Friedman et al., 2011; Miranda-Mendizábal et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2020). They suffer minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and are more likely to have experienced early trauma (Craig et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Particular attention is needed for the most vulnerable LGBTQ+ students such as bisexual and transgender individuals (Gnan et al., 2019). Whilst literature exists on LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching (Moore, 2014; Mikulec, 2016), there is a considerable research gap specifically addressing the pedagogical potential of learning development as a vehicle for this.

Building on the foundation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and decolonisation, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy (TIP) acknowledges the barriers to learning faced by trauma-experienced students and promotes inclusive approaches (Baker, 2022). Using the TIP framework, the session invited delegates to consider how the trauma-informed educator can create and maintain a safe, inclusive and empowering learning space. We invited delegates to reflect on their own inclusive practices in relation to LGBTQ+ students and how to best support the needs of a group who can remain largely invisible. Using case studies, we explored how TIP approaches can be applied in a learning development context to benefit not only LGBTQ+ students, but the student body as a whole.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ students; trauma-informed pedagogy; learning development; higher education; inclusive practice.

Community response

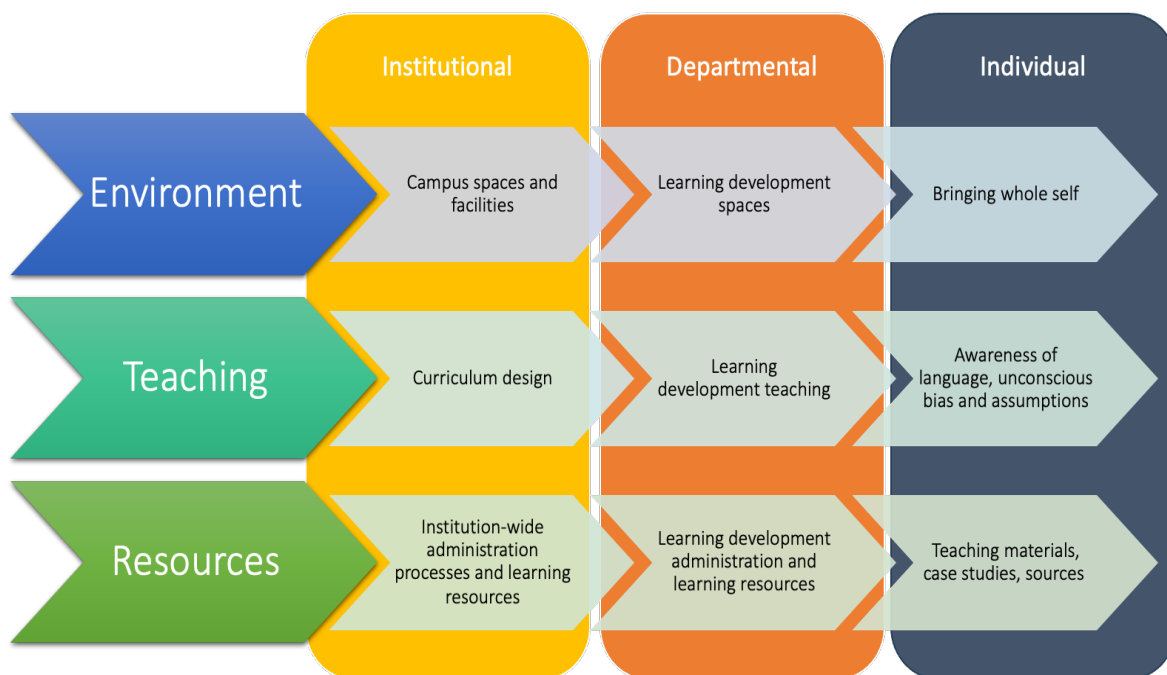
The presentation was well received by the community. The broad topic of equality, diversity and inclusion is a growing theme within higher education practice and has served as a conference theme (in different guises) throughout recent ALDinHE conferences.

I'd really like to thank the presenters for the good humour and generosity of spirit with which they led and facilitated the session. I look forward to hearing more about their research as it progresses.

This session presented thought-provoking suggestions on how those working within learning development can act as agents of change, enabling curriculum design approaches to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ students. The inclusion framework (see Figure 1) and audit was particularly useful, providing tools and techniques to take away and use within our own institutions.

I found this a very engaging and wide-ranging workshop, providing much material for reflection and lots of interesting resources (including recent relevant scholarship) to follow-up on. The inclusion framework looks like a helpful and practical starting point both for reflecting on current practice and positioning one's own learning development practice in relation to broader institutional, curricula, departmental contexts and structures.

Figure 1. LGBTQ+ inclusion framework (presenters' slides).



One of the challenges of inclusion has always been incorporating the topic into the scope of learning development. This is not to say learning development is not inclusive, but that there is less scope to tackle such issues outside of academic curricula – something addressed by two members of the community:

As a member of the LGBTQ+ Community, this topic is something that is close to my heart. It's often challenging to see how learning developers have the place or power to drive forward social change, especially when we are not based within disciplines or academic departments. Relegated to focus on academic literacies and skills, it feels like engagement with current issues becomes tokenistic – like choosing an LGBTQ+ article for a referencing demonstration. But there I am – thinking of the service and the bigger picture. Yes, maybe we can address this through Universal Design for Learning (Rose, Meyer and Gordon, 2014) and Trauma-Informed Pedagogy (Mays, 2021) – but what I liked about this session was the reminder to focus on the individual student too. Thinking more about the power of a single interaction with an individual has felt quite empowering to be the change.

An interesting topic of discussion that came up, prompted by the questionnaire exercise, was learning developers' own varied scope for agency when it comes to

LGBTQ+ inclusive educational practice (e.g., in the design of curricula, teaching materials and assessment tasks). It would be good to see time and space given for a more detailed exploration of these questions; I suspect there may well be substantial interest in an [ALDinHE Community of Practice](#) as these do provide time and space for more extended conversations, sharing and development of practice etc.

Comments relating to how the work could be widened to include wider representation was highlighted among community representatives. This includes a critical take on the concept of 'queerness' – placing focus on the diversity within such labels and warning against stereotypes:

One aspect of the conversation where I felt slightly uncomfortable was the discussion about what 'queerness' looks like. I think that trying to allocate visual characteristics to minorities can lead to excluding people from those groups, it mirrors the similar discussion in disability advocacy about 'what a disabled person looks like'. I believe queer people's identities and sexualities are not always obvious and this can be intentional or unintentional. Expecting people to conform to specific stereotypes also creates a narrative that some people are better at 'being queer' by how they represent themselves.

The novel approach of including decoloniality alongside Universal Design for Learning and Trauma-informed pedagogy was thought-provoking. I wondered whether this approach could be used more generally to support minorities within higher education. I would encourage the presenters to ensure that they include colonial voices from the Global South if they continue with this approach as the sources that were listed with regard to LGBTQ+ experiences are all from the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia. Perhaps they would find these sources useful:

- Pathania (2018).
- Matebeni, Monro and Reddy (2018).

Authors' reflection

Both presenters have contributed independent reflections on the presentations. First, we hear from Bev Hancock-Smith:

For me, the generous, thought-provoking and considered contributions from session participants has prompted greater critical engagement with this subject. A particularly interesting strand to emerge from the discussion focussed on the challenge to provide authentic representation beyond stereotypical tropes. A wider lens on inclusive practice across the sector was also hugely valuable. I'm delighted that the model has provided a useful framework from which to consider LGBTQ+ inclusivity within the learning development environment. I am even more delighted by the responses from participants who acknowledge the agency our role as learning developers can offer and how we can act as agents for change not only within our own teams, but within the institution more broadly.

Bev's comment was furthered by Zara Hooley, who added:

It was really interesting to reflect on how usefully the model can be applied to the range of learning development settings that were presented by participants at the workshop. It was enlightening to hear about embedded LGBTQ+ practice already taking place at a variety of institutions, and a great deal of the value in this workshop was the sharing of those resources, experiences and ideas. Having delivered the session and reflected on participants feedback, I think we need to develop the detail of the model to further unpick the relationship between the different spheres of influence covered by the categories of institutional, departmental and individual.

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Zara Hooley (she/her) has taught in secondary and higher education for 23 years and is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Learning and Study Support at De Montfort University (DMU). Zara has a PhD in Sociology focusing on same-sex family creation and friendship. Zara is an active member of the Centre for Reproductive Research where she works as a freelance Research Assistant.

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