How are Learning Developers engaging with artificial intelligence?

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Presentation abstract

In recent years, Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has become the topic of debate within higher education generally, within institutions (their official response and approach), within subject areas (how to utilise within subject teaching) and within the professional sphere of Learning Development. In the summer of 2023, an Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) Community of Practice was established, and now, it has over 200 members from the UK, Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. This group meets monthly to discuss all aspects of Gen AI, and this mini keynote will share how Learning Developers are engaging (or not) with Gen AI. The session will be open and friendly. Designed to enable colleagues to discuss their challenges, avoidance or how they embrace AI within their practice.

Prompt Questions

1) Are you engaging with Artificial Intelligence (AI)? If so, how? If not, why not?
2) Should Learning Developers be engaging with AI? If so, how?
3) What could ALDinHE do to support your (potential) engagement with AI?

Keywords: artificial intelligence; AI; generative AI; Gen AI; Learning Development.

Community response

The author reported a strong attendance across all rotations of this keynote, with around 25 people attending each session. While there were no direct responses from the community on this session, the author has provided a strong overview of the discussion:

This mini keynote focused on Gen AI and attracted an overwhelming response from the community. This demonstrated how Gen AI is very current and an evolving topic for the entire higher education sector and Learning Developers. Mini keynotes usually have a table of approximately eight to 10 people, but in the three individual sessions, this topic drew a large audience.

Each of the three sessions had different flavours:

> The first focussed on the impact of the tutorial on students, and how it would change the nature of expertise needed by the Learning Development tutors when working with the students.

> The second session focused more on the impact of Gen AI on the higher education sector, inclusive of, and beyond Learning Development. This second session mainly focused on projects such as utilising Gen AI to assess formative assessment, which created a 'hot debate'. The delegates were ideologically opposed to the use of Gen AI in formative assessments, but as chair, I played devil's advocate in developing the discussion. There was an understanding that professional and transferable skills related to Gen AI were vital.

> The third session spent time discussing the fears of the Learning Development community. Despite the concerns, this discussion had multiple contributors reflect on their good news stories, often focused on how some teams had grasped the challenge and were working with students to unpick the potential impact of Gen AI.

The general feeling across all participants was that this was an exciting and thought-provoking morning, and many delegates approached me after the session to continue sharing their experiences and concerns.

Editorial comment

The continual development of AI tools is an ongoing challenge for all areas of society, with some commentators posing bold questions about what it means for humanity (Richardson et al., 2024). While it may be early days to answer such existential questions, AI is already having a significant impact on the world of work (World Economic Forum, 2023) and shows great potential to drive paradigm shifts within all educational and learning contexts, especially higher education. The *Journal for Learning Development in Higher Education* (JLDHE) has already witnessed a significant increase in submissions focused on AI, and there will be an inevitable increase in scholarly engagement with AI over the coming years. The challenges associated with AI are now forever present, especially as AI becomes an aspect of 'business as usual' instead of an innovation on the periphery.

Next steps and additional questions

This keynote engaged with AI, posing critical questions for the Learning Development community. These questions remain valid for all professionals in higher education and are worth revisiting as both the technology and the community's engagement with it evolve. Getting involved with the [ALDinHE AI Community of Practice](#) is a great way to continue contributing to answering the above questions and sharing experiences with other Learning Developers.

Author's reflection

In the three sessions I chaired, there was standing room only (averaging about 25 people per rotation) and each of the three sessions was slightly different. I planned to initiate discussion by verbally sharing my experiences of leading Gen AI provision at the University of Northampton (UON) and more recently, at BPP University. I explained how at

UON I was writing and creating guidance and policy as well as creating communities of practice, whereas at BPP University I am developing AI approaches to support student use but also in-house AI solutions for things such as the creation of multiple choice questions and auto-marking/feedback/grading. Both institutions have a different focus.

In each rotation, a different aspect was discussed. One focussed on academic integrity, another wanting to know more about how I have been working on projects to utilise Gen AI for academic staff tasks (marking, feedback, grading) and the third focussed on how we cannot know the full impact of AI on education, society, everything - yet.

It was wonderful to spend time with colleagues who were also interested in Gen AI - some of which were openly unsure about it, through to those who would be considered experts and trailblazers. I hope it was beneficial for those who attended.

Acknowledgements

References

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Author details

Kate Coulson is an Associate Dean at BPP University with a background in learning and teaching and has worked in the University sector for 20 years. She is a National Teaching Fellow and Associate Professor. She has worked on national and international projects with Advance HE, the QAA and JISC related to digital skills, assessment and feedback, student belonging and many more. Her role at BPP focuses on Learning, Teaching, Assessment, and the Student Experience across the institution. Generative AI and how we embed it into the curriculum and assessment is currently one of her biggest challenges and her research interests include the impact of teaching upon student progression and retention, as well as student resilience, critical thinking, and gamification. Kate has published widely and presented at national and international conferences and is Deputy Chair of the Association for Learning Developers in Higher Education.

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