



Designing values-based Learning Development spaces

Barbara Nicolls

Buckinghamshire New University, UK

Abstract

Learning Development (LD) is emerging as a transformative force in the constantly evolving landscape of higher education (HE) requiring LD to adapt to technological, cultural and pedagogical changes while embracing cultural diversity and weaving values into their pedagogical practices in the physical and virtual spaces that are available to them. Learning spaces play a crucial role in education, impacting student engagement, comfort and overall learning outcomes, and therefore it is crucial for LD to thoughtfully design diverse spaces for 'working in partnership with students and staff to make sense and get the most out of HE', one of ALDinHE's (2024) five values of learning development, and 'promote engagement in learning and equity of opportunity for all to reach their potential' (Advance HE, 2023).

The poster illustrates how the campus-based LD office, and Class Collaborate for one-to-one and group tutorials, in one UK HEI were intentionally designed to develop agentic, empowered learners who engage in meaningful conversations with the tutor and/or their peers, co-construct knowledge and navigate HE through respectful dialogue to make sense of their academic journey, thrive and achieve their goals. These dynamic, sustainable spaces are underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework demonstrating teaching presence (TP) and social presence (SP), fostering critical thinking essential for learning and cognitive presence (CP).

LD spaces where TP, SP and CP, the interrelated elements of Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2001) community of inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework, interact are inclusive places for creating deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experiences taking into account diverse learning needs including social justice issues.

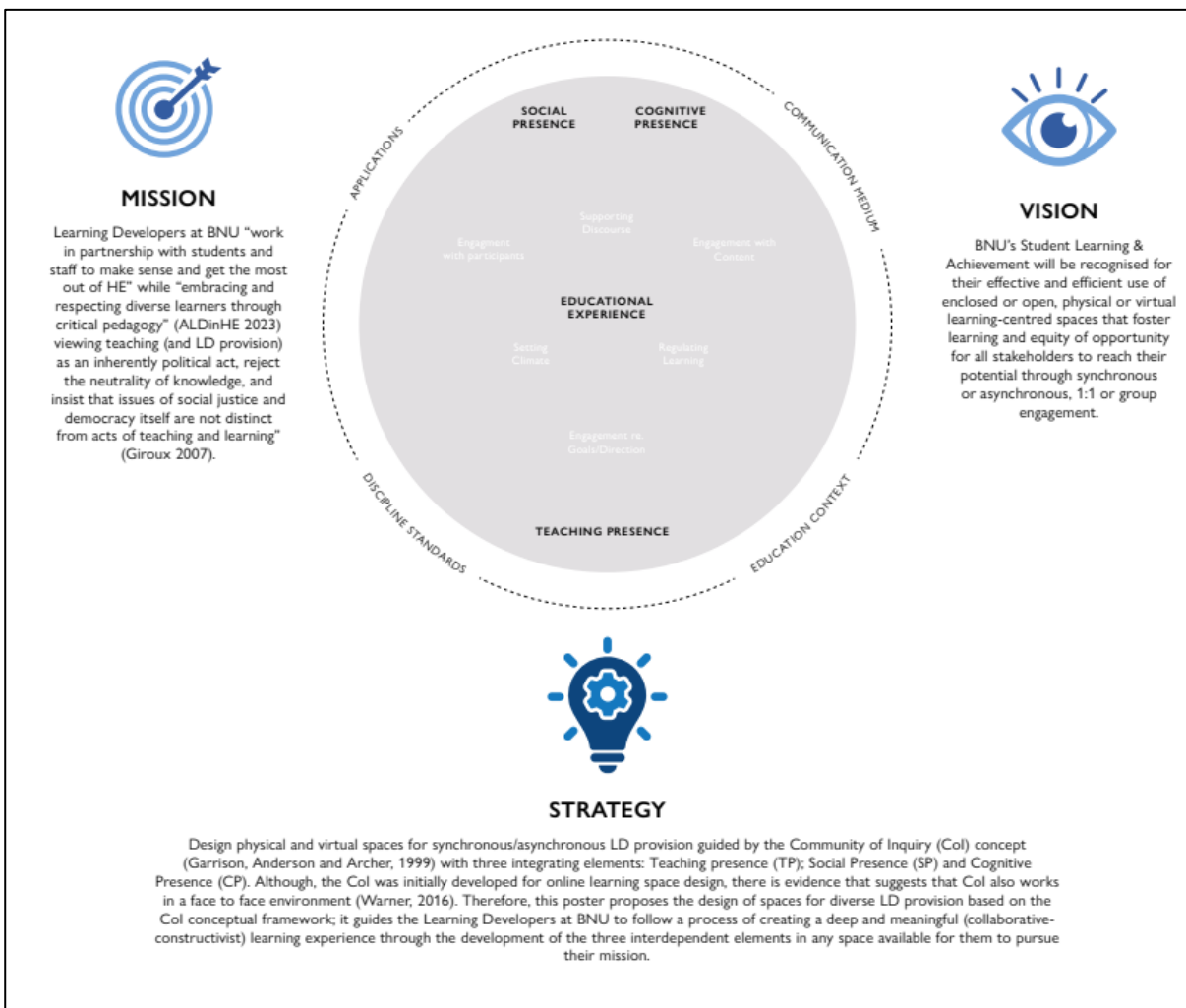
It is noteworthy that spaces influence how learning developers facilitate learning and how students learn on a case-by-case basis, and that the Col can be a blueprint for designing future physical and virtual spaces for LD promotion.

Keywords: community of inquiry; sustainable; collaborative; transformative; partnership.

Community response

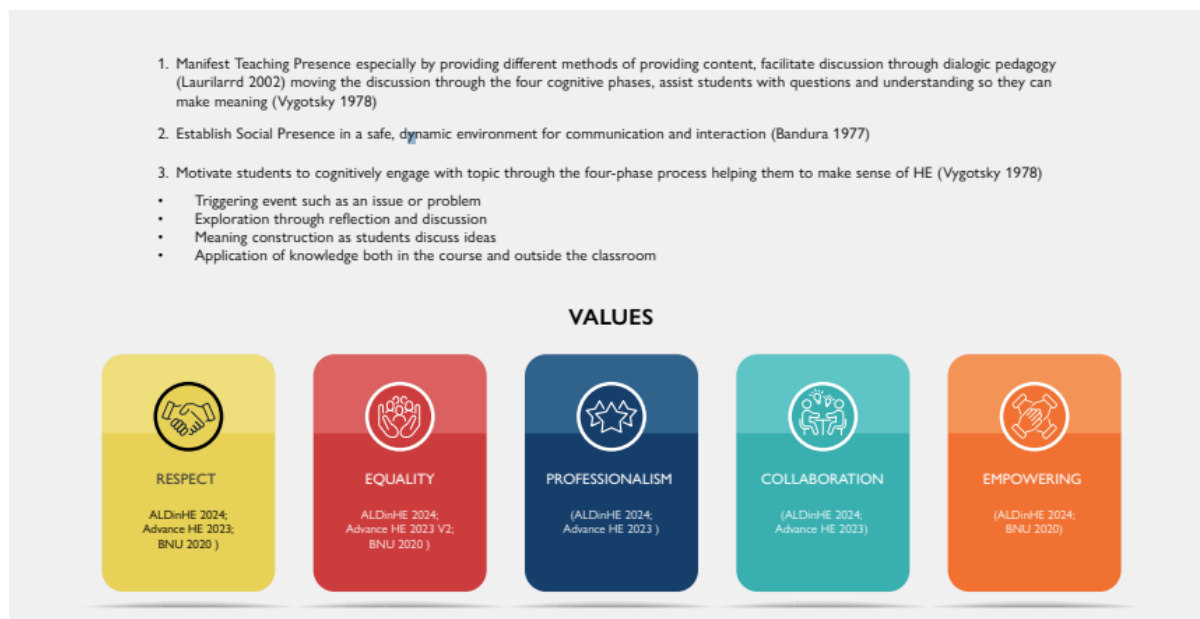
Underpinned by social constructivism and conversational framework literature, Barbara’s poster includes a model for designing values-based transformative and inclusive learning spaces. The poster specifically illustrates how this can be applied in the context of Learning Development (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Extract from Barbara’s poster.



This poster also includes five core values pertaining to the delivery of Learning Development (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Extract 2 from Barbara's poster



The poster particularly resonated with a conference attendee who had previously been involved in the design of a new university library which included the development of a dedicated space for Learning Development and librarian teams:

I see a clear mission, vision and strategy as essential ingredients to ensuring there is a coherent and connected campus experience. When we built our new university library about ten years ago we did not have an institutional Education and Student Experience Strategy. Although we consulted students, academics, professional services staff and the Students' Union to really understand what the university community needed from the building, I feel that the library is one of many discrete learning spaces rather than part of an integrated campus wide ecosystem of learning spaces.

Next steps and additional questions

It would be interesting to see a follow-up poster or conference presentation detailing how student and Learning Development practitioners are experiencing the newly developed learning spaces. Are these working as intended? Have the newly designed spaces resulted in increased student engagement with the Learning Development service? Have the new learning spaces facilitated the Learning Development team to adopt new ways of

working with students? With the benefit of hindsight, would anything be designed differently?

Author's reflection

I would like to begin by highlighting that the proposed values-based LD spaces align well with the principles of Values-based Education (VbE). They are environments where the LD practitioners situate themselves, be they enclosed, open, physical or virtual, for stakeholders to experience the positive universal values of respect, integrity, honesty, inclusivity and compassion first-hand throughout their collaboration with the LD practitioners. Therefore, my poster is more about community of inquiry (CoI) (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2001) environments comprising teaching presence (TP), social presence (SP) and cognitive presence (CP) guided by values, and less about the physical characteristics of spaces, as they aim to promote engagement through inquiry, collaboration and equity of opportunity for all to achieve and succeed.

The CoI underpins how LD practitioners transform the third space (Whitchurch, 2008), the conceptual space between the student body and the wider university into a unique environment for learning and development. The third space includes the dedicated LD office or virtual rooms in Class Collaborate, community spaces such as the library, classrooms where the LD practitioners collaborate with subject experts and their students to deliver synchronous, contextualised academic literacies or even public areas campus-based cafes and gardens where learners congregate. An example is the newly built Atrium – a multi-purpose block used to hold BNU's LD practitioners' pop-up events not only to introduce the who, what, how of the team and their LD provision promoting academic literacy workshops, but also as meeting spaces with the wider university staff to demystify the purpose of LD and be mediators (Johnson, 2018) for learners' positive learning outcomes. The CoI concept encourages LD practitioners to take this opportunity for Making Every Contact Count (MECC) (NHS England, 2016) through honest conversations about how they partner and collaborate with academics and learners to develop resources, design curricula or run collaborative workshops (TP) that address specific learning needs. As third space occupants, the LD Practitioners are seen as non-threatening and foster SP with open communication in a risk-free learning environment, which leads to CP for all stakeholders. Conceptualised as a CoI space where the stakeholders collaborate and

learn with one another appears to be an effective way of demonstrating LD relevance and usefulness (Hood, 2024) to the wider community and remain committed to LD core values (ALDinHE, 2024). Complemented with BNU Drive Values (Buckinghamshire New University, 2020) and PSF 2023 (Advance HE 2023), the CoI design of LD spaces is currently showing evidence of impact in the Business School, Nursing and Operating Department Practice.

The values-based CoI Writing Café for nursing dissertations, which is intended to be 'developmental and creative', existing outside academic norms (Pritchard, 2015), can foster 'partnership and empowerment' (Baer and Kearney, 2023) through effective TP; LD practitioners create spaces for dialogue with and among the learners to examine academic writing conventions (Pritchard, 2021) including objectivity, critical analysis, evidence-based writing and structure. The risk-free learning environment of the Writing Café facilitates discourse through open communication for shaping constructive exchange and direct instructions to address issues relating to academic literacy. This then leads to SP resulting in CP. The challenge for LD practitioners is making it work; writing is a process with a series of Writing Cafés when learners have the opportunity to inquire, practice, discuss, learn, produce (Laurillard, 2002) and reflect on their learning. I would like to suggest that the Writing Cafés are more effective if they are timetabled and delivered in collaboration with the subject specialists to ensure the LD provision is appropriately contextualised.

The values-based CoI spaces foster a coaching approach as a universal critical pedagogy in thinking as the LD practitioners are guided by TP, SP and CP rather than teaching the learners something entirely new. This is effective when LD practitioners work synchronously in physical and virtual spaces with students who are aware of their academic literacy needs for success because the LD practitioners can only help them realise and understand what they already subconsciously know (Gibran, 1923) about academic literacy.

Though I feel disempowered in these environments, my intention to transform is a non-deficit approach that develops learner agency, self-efficacy and empowerment, enabling learners to transform from someone who is 'coming-to-know' to someone who is 'coming-to-be' (Green and Lee, 1995) a member of the higher education community. This is evident in the assessment outcomes and reports from learners themselves.

Not all learners, specifically, the hard-to-reach students seem to expect coaching as the approach in LD environments; this can be a barrier to their participation with agency in LD provision. They choose to acquire knowledge through accessing the online resources within the LD virtual environment demonstrating the TP; however, for learning (CP) to be manifested, the LD practitioners incorporate inquiry, practice, discussion, practice, production learning types (Laurillard, 2002) and reflection (TP) by operationalising the Col framework underpinned by the values cited earlier. It is important for LD practitioners to develop SP as the teacher-student relationship is crucial for learners to perceive the meaning and value of learning activities and can directly affect their learning efficiency and academic engagement levels (Sha, Kan and Li, 2020) impacting CP. This shows that SP is equally important in any values-based learning environments for positive learning outcomes, indicating that, wherever LD practitioners situate themselves, enabling learners to engage in meaningful conversations with them and their peers requires the adoption of new ways of working with learners.

Finally, the growing number of conversations in the Col values-based learning development spaces leading to effective and efficient working with the learners both in virtual and in-person situations (Warner, 2016) have demonstrated the relevance of LD to the disciplinary community and their learners; however, in order for BNU's LD to contribute the BNU's THRIVE 28 Strategy, one of the pillars of which is to 'support students to succeed', the practitioners need to collaborate with the Learning Enhancement and Academic Practice team and access hard-to-reach subject experts to promote their services.

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Author details

Barbara Nicolls is a seasoned Learning Development specialist with over 30 years of experience in HE. Her NTF was awarded mainly because of her student-centred, collaborative approaches which are enhanced by technology. She is reflective practitioner, and her teaching approaches are evidence-based. Barbara continues to apply the LD principles and values though she has moved away from BNU's LD provision and currently leads the Postgraduate Certificate in Practice Education where she develops innovative approaches and fosters a culture of continuous improvement among her academic peers and all students.

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