



## Interviewing the author

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### ***Presentation abstract***

A key task for students is to formulate questions that guide their research. However, in my experience, they struggle with this skill. Students can often articulate topics for research but find it harder to translate these into questions that guide their process. To facilitate this task, I encourage students to imagine they have an interview scheduled with the author of the book they are gathering data from. I ask them to prepare questions for a 30-minute interview. Then I encourage them to 'interview the author' by finding the answers in the book within a time limit. This way of framing the task has anecdotally proven successful in unlocking understanding for this part of the research process. Pretending to interview the author enables the student to think of this study skill in a different light that 'provokes us to mental activity' leading them to identify the 'similar' principles between the practice (Whitton, 2018). In this case, between preparing questions for a live interview and preparing questions for research.

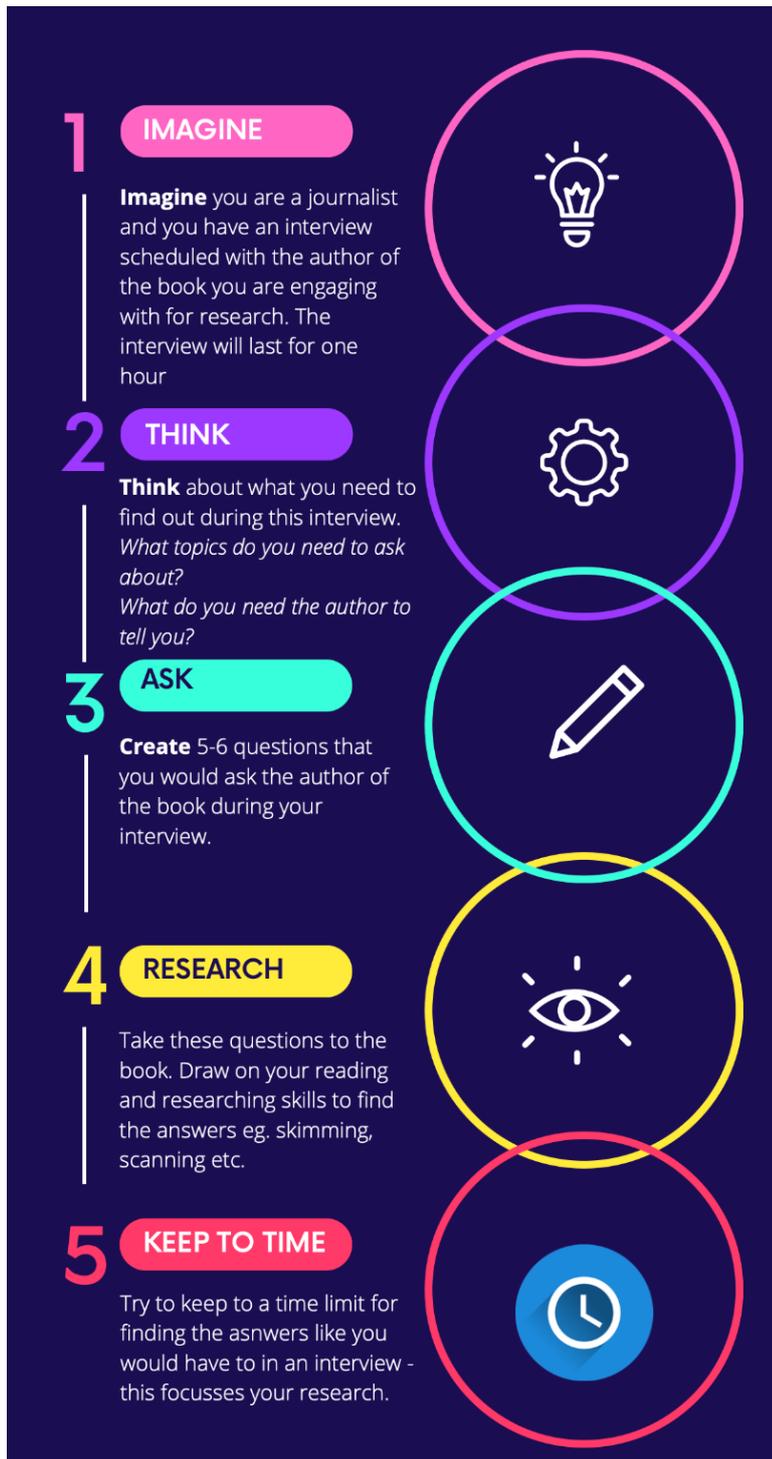
Imaginative role play for learning was briefly explored as part of the presentation, using Whitton's work, *Fostering imagination in higher education* (2018). Participants then discussed the following questions, offering the chance for deeper collaborative analysis:

1. Do you use imaginative role play to introduce any study skills to your students?
2. Can you see any barriers or potential for misleading guidance using role play in this way?
3. What opportunities could we provide for students to engage in imaginative role-play to further their understanding of particular study skills?

**Keywords:** learning; study skills; imaginative; role play.

## Presentation infographic

Figure 1. Research simulation: interviewing the author by Jo Dowds.



## ***Community response***

For this particular session, there was one detailed response from the community, which is presented here, drawing on the use of the session.

This was a really interesting and innovative idea which, judging by the discussion I was involved in, has a number of potential applications. As well as discussing how we could make use of the approach presented, we also considered ways in which it could be adapted/expanded to include activities like imagining a panel of authors, each with different perspectives, being asked to respond to the same questions. As learning developers, we're always looking for ways to encourage students to engage more actively and critically with the material they read and the approach outlined here provided both a creative and readily usable/adaptable means of doing just that.

To further build a reflection of the community response, a further reflection from the author is included to summarise the discussion points.

### **Author's summary of the discussion**

I asked delegates at the end of the presentation and discussion to write down one thing they would change in their practice as a result of this presentation: feedback was that this was a helpful task for delegates. However, I did not then collate this information for sharing here! From memory, some shared that they would do the following types of things:

- Use the strategy with students when they come to them with barriers in approaching a research task.
- Think of an assessment that could incorporate this journalism metaphor/analogy into it as context for the whole assignment.
- Use the strategy to frame research tasks in class.
- Look to adapt the strategy to use as a group role play exercise with certain journal articles/texts where students work as a team of journalists to create a written piece.

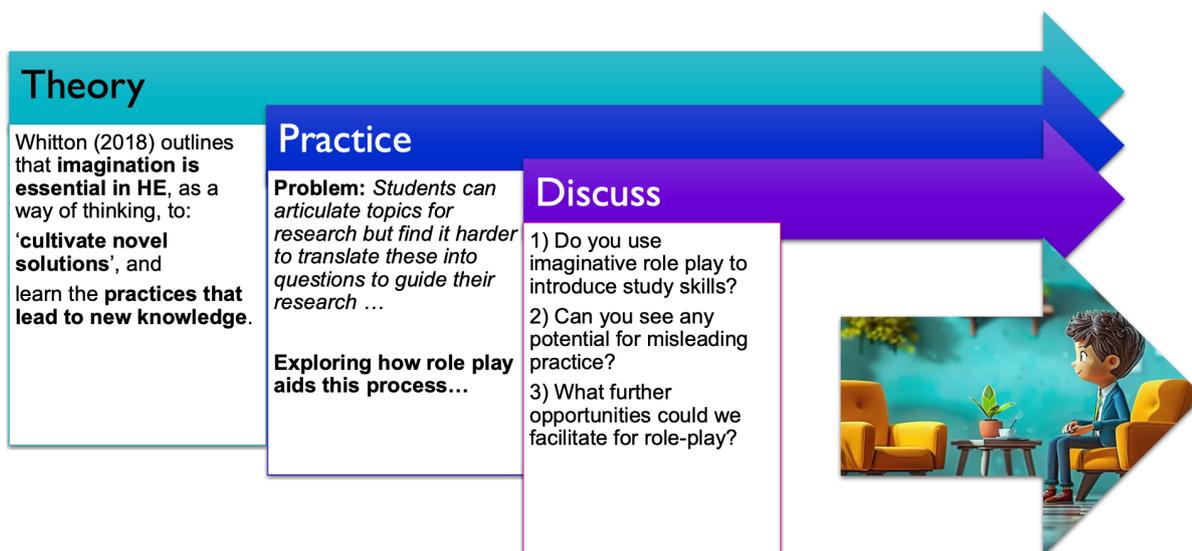
One delegate highlighted how useful it was to have Whitton's (2018) theory underpinning the practice of using this type of strategy. Whitton's theory in a nutshell advocates how

essential it is that HE embraces imagination in teaching practices to create practices that facilitate new knowledge and novel solutions.

## **Editorial comment**

In a world challenged by poverty, pollution, conflict and other twenty-first-century challenges, Whitton (2018) argues imagination and creativity are crucial for the production of novel solutions to these challenges. This is important for higher education, with the World Economic Forum (2023) identifying analytical and creative thinking as the two key skills that employers identify for workers. Developing these key academic literacies, however, is challenging. In the presentation, Jo has set out a useful process to support students with the use of imaginative roleplay for research. This approach supports practice – and is underpinned by theory (see Figure 2, which is extracted from the author’s presentation). Supporting students to develop these critical employability skills is a worthy pursuit, and ‘Interviewing the author’ presents a great opportunity for Learning Developers to frame these skills in the context of our work.

**Figure 2. Interviewing the Author; imaginative role play in research.**



## ***Next steps and additional questions***

The process of 'interviewing the author' can be seen as a call to action. Drawing on the original questions from the session, it is useful to consider: What further opportunities could we facilitate for role-play?

## ***Author's reflection***

Thank you for your feedback, I am glad this '*Interviewing the Author*' approach is perceived as a useful yet adaptable resource to use with students with many different applications specific to context. I, too, was encouraged by the discussions around ways to expand the approach, such as the similarities in the role of research for both student and journalist and the necessity to prepare questions in advance for an interviewee, which in turn aids students in thinking about their pre-research process with written material, allowing them to build on this skill. The discussions were indeed fruitful, as was the critique made that not all students would find thinking in the terms of a journalist helpful if they have negative experiences with journalism. It would be beneficial to explore further other roles that the student could play if that of a journalist was disagreeable. In delivering this, I was inspired further to use the resource more and continue to adapt it for purpose so I am grateful to all who participated. I hope that Learning Developers will answer this call and continue to explore imaginative ways of engaging students with research.

## ***Acknowledgements***

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## ***References***

Whitton, J. (2018) *Fostering imagination in higher education*. 1<sup>st</sup> edn. London: Taylor and Francis. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1381325/fostering-imagination-in-higher-education-disciplinary-and-professional-practices-pdf> (Accessed: 29 February 2024).

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## ***Author details***

Jo Dowds is a Study Skills Specialist and Tutor of Theology working within higher education. Jo supports university students with study skills online across the UK studying at all levels from undergraduate to PhD, in a vast range of subjects. Alongside supporting university lecturers unpacking the impact of neurodiversity on their learning and profession Jo holds a variety of other roles: teaching Theology at Spurgeon's College and the Light College, working as a proofreader for PhD theses, and also working at a Further Education Arts Academy in Poole as a Learning Specialist supporting both students and teachers, facilitating an accessible environment of learning.

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