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The five Ps of LD in practice: student partnership approaches in one-to-one, workshops and online work

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Abstract

Learning Development espouses values that promote tailored, holistic, empowering, emancipatory, non-judgemental and student-centred practice. However, it is harder to imagine what these values look like as concrete principles in the context of our work, so we can ensure that we are consciously and deliberately enacting them. The Five Ps of LD (Webster, 2023) were developed as a framework to embed the principle of 'formulation' into LD practice. Formulation is a partnership approach, borrowed from counselling and psychology, in which the student and the LDer work together as equals to explore academic skills issues holistically and identify suitable ways forward in the context of the student's own lived experience, rather than a hierarchical, directive one in which the LDer diagnoses and prescribes guidance to the passive student. It also offers a way to turn Academic Literacies (Lea and Street, 1998) from an abstract theory to a pedagogy and a praxis.

This partnership approach has many benefits, not least ensuring that provision is inclusive, emancipatory, and empowering rather than normative and oppressive. It centres and validates the student's perspective, expertise, and experience of their own learning, not just that of academia, inviting them to respond to the practices and conventions of higher education as works best for them. It also offers a lens to make visible the distinct expertise that Learning Developers bring.

This workshop explored practical approaches for using the Five Ps of LD in a range of common LD contexts: the one-to-one tutorial, small and large group workshops, and online resources. It considered how to use dialogic partnership approaches even in circumstances which favour one-way dissemination of 'skills guidance'.

Keywords: partnership approach; formulation; academic literacies; inclusive pedagogy; empowerment.


Community response

The presentation effectively distilled and operationalised the principles published in the author's article 'The Five Ps of LD: using formulation in Learning Development work for a student-centred approach to study skills' (Webster, 2023), while also offering a practical framework for implementing the formulation approach in Learning Development work across various contexts.

Webster opened by highlighting the disconnect between Learning Developers' theories and values (rooted in Academic Literacies and critical pedagogy) and their actual practice, echoing her concern about the risk of falling into deficit-based, prescriptive approaches. The slides clearly illustrated how Learning Development practice can inadvertently align with medical or banking models of education, which are at odds with the field's espoused values. Both the narrative and visuals made the issue more tangible and relatable for practitioners.

The Five Ps model (Presenting 'Problem', Pertinent factors, Perception of task, Process, Product) makes it easy for practitioners to grasp and implement in various contexts (e.g. one-to-one tutorials, workshops, online resources).

Figure 1. The original Five Ps of LD: slide from Webster's presentation.
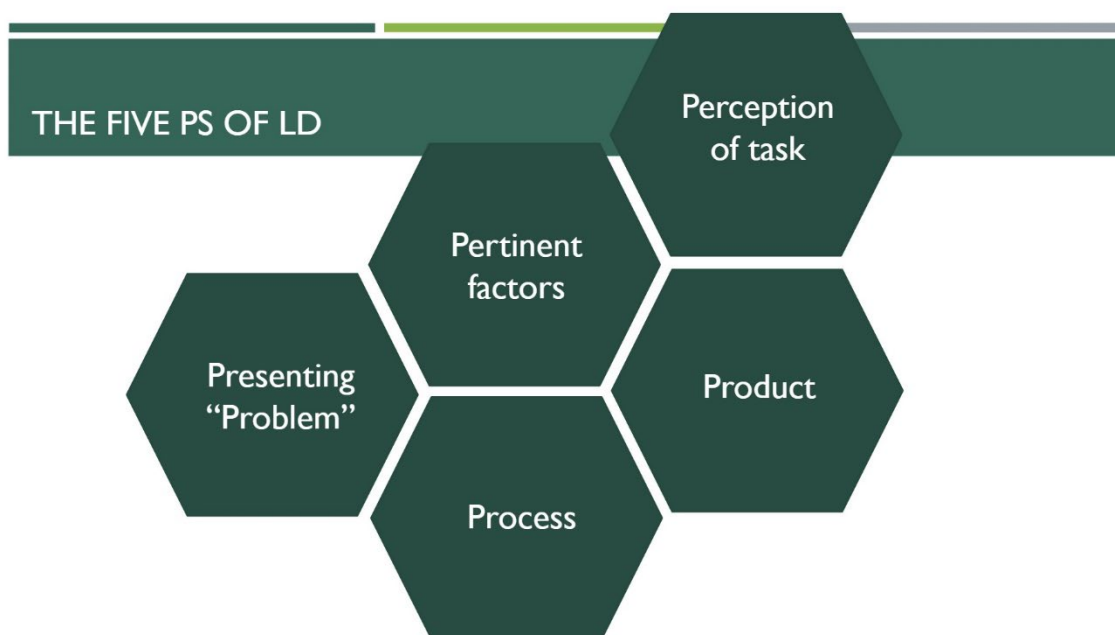
In the presentation and the discussion that followed, Webster encouraged practitioners to consider how they might use the Five Ps to structure sessions, create activities, and articulate their contributions. It was clear that this practical focus meant to complement the more theoretical discussion in the 2023 article.

Next steps and additional questions

The presentation effectively translated the theoretical foundations laid out in Webster's article into a more accessible, practice-oriented format that proposed a clear framework for implementation in Learning Developers' work. The challenge now lies in how Learning Developers can integrate this approach into their daily practice and institutional contexts, and in evaluating its impact on student learning. The following questions may help guide this integration:

- How might Learning Developers scaffold their own transition from potentially directive practices to this more collaborative approach? And how can they effectively communicate the benefits of this approach to students who may be expecting more directive guidance?
- What challenges might arise when implementing this approach in group settings, and how can these be addressed? Similarly, how can the Five Ps framework be

used to enhance the design of online resources while maintaining its collaborative ethos?

- In what ways might this approach influence the broader institutional understanding of Learning Development's role and value? What opportunities does this framework present for gathering insights about student learning experiences that could inform institutional practices and policies?

Author's reflection

The Five Ps of LD is something I have been working on for quite some time. It has roots in my early days as a Learning Developer, thrown in the deep end with only whatever tools I had to hand, and also in my later career, trying to make the case for Learning Development as a distinct and deeply skilled, expert role. I first presented a paper on it at ALDCon 2018, and the feedback from that session was very helpful in shaping it into a journal article, published in 2023. As the foundations of this framework are borrowed and adapted from another profession, it was important to me to ensure that the theory behind it was right, and that I'd thoroughly worked the concept through in previous papers, However, this session for me was the really important step. How might Learning Developers use it in practice? Would it align with their values and be relevant in the context they work in?

I chose to offer this session as a workshop rather than a paper, a more collaborative enterprise in the spirit of formulation. I wanted to ascertain whether the Five Ps of LD is simply a 'nice idea in theory' or if other practitioners felt it would also work in practice. The FIve Ps of LD comes from a one-to-one context, where it's easy to see how it might be implemented (and would make a solid case for offering longer one-to-ones working with a student rather than simply delivering advice at them). However, if it is really reflective of LD's values, it ought to work across any format that we operate in, which is rather harder, and where I needed colleagues' help to pool their experience to flesh this out together.

There were some really insightful ideas, expanding and taking it in new directions, including ones I was struggling with, and some knotty questions which really tested how well it might underpin our work in all contexts. One particular issue raised was whether we should always aim to work in the spirit of formulation, or if there are instances where we

switch to another mode (more in the medical or banking model of 'giving advice'). I think so – this too can be negotiated with the student, and to promote independent, student-centred learning can remain the goal even if in the short term a student might be too overwhelmed to participate fully. I was really grateful for all the contributions, ideas, and questions. It was especially good to see how much expertise participants were keen to claim for Learning Development, a field where we often sell ourselves – or are sold – short. I am really excited to see how the Five Ps evolves; how people implement, adapt, and expand it in future!

Acknowledgements

References

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