



Editorial

Making the invisible work of collective writing visible

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We are delighted to present the third special edition of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education's* Collaborative Conference Proceedings and Reflections.

Before we proceed, however, we want to pause to acknowledge a profound loss to our community. It is with deep sadness that we mark the passing of Tom Burns, whose presence in the Learning Development community embodied everything that makes our field special. Tom was not just a colleague but a friend to so many of us – his warmth, energy, and genuine interest in others made every interaction with him meaningful. His commitment to equality of access and collaboration wasn't just professional; it was part of who he was (a 'leveller'!), reflected in his endless enthusiasm for bringing people together. He understood intuitively that the strength of our community lies in our willingness to share, support, and learn from each other. We will miss his infectious enthusiasm, his ready smile, and his ability to make everyone feel included and important. This special issue is dedicated to his memory, and we hope that these Collaborative Proceedings, which represent so many of the values Tom championed – collegiality, shared learning, and the power of working together – will serve as a fitting tribute to his legacy.

What began as an innovative experiment in 2022 has now evolved into an established platform for extending and enriching the conversations that emerge from our annual ALDinHE Conference. Yet even as we settle into familiar patterns, the uniqueness of this collaborative endeavour continues to both challenge and inspire us.

The 2024 ALDinHE Conference, hosted by three institutions: the University of Glasgow, the University of Strathclyde, and Glasgow Caledonian University, brought the Learning Development community together at a time when higher education continues to face significant struggles. The post-pandemic landscape has settled into new patterns, but these patterns reveal persistent questions about student engagement, digital equity, and the evolving nature of student support. Against this backdrop, the conference themes explored building Learning Development for the future, alongside developing inclusive learning spaces and empowering student partnerships, themes that provided a rich foundation for the conversations and reflections captured in these Proceedings. This year,

they include 68 contributions, with each piece representing not just the original session or presentation, but the ripples of thought and discussion it created throughout the conference and beyond. The community responses capture both immediate reactions and considered reflections, while the authors' final thoughts often reveal how their own thinking has evolved through this collaborative process.

Writing collaboratively is so much more than multiple people contributing words to a page. Collaborative writing is a conversation, a joint endeavour with a shared understanding and a common goal. When we write collaboratively, we undertake to negotiate a route together through the melee of ideas, words and thoughts in which we're all immersed, to find the ones that resonate best with us and express something that each writer can subscribe to as their own. It's a form of alchemy that transforms and uplifts our voice as a writer and takes us further than we can go alone. At its best, it can be life-changing.

Yet the collaboration itself, the joining together and the dialogue that makes collaborative writing possible, is rarely visible to the reader. Those conversations and searches for meaning are hidden behind the text, smoothed out to create an impression of unified thought and problem-free discussion, the multiple voices reduced to a single one. Part of the joy of the Collaborative Conference Proceedings is that they present a weaving together of impressions and reflections without losing the individuality of each thread, prioritising and celebrating the process rather than a final polished product.

This visibility of the process, this celebration of multiple voices, is what makes our Collaborative Conference Proceedings and Reflections distinctly different from traditional academic publishing of conference proceedings. When we first embarked on this journey two years ago, we sought to create something that would extend conference conversations, the atmosphere present at the sessions, and the ideas and thoughts they inspired beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the event itself. What we discovered was that we were also creating a new way of capturing and preserving the vibrant, multi-vocal nature of academic discourse that has been flourishing within and around Learning Development. While traditional conference proceedings often present polished, final thoughts, our collaborative format preserves the messiness of real

academic conversation: the questions that emerge, the half-formed ideas, the moments of connection that often happen in corridor conversations. These are equally valuable parts of our scholarly discourse.

Our editorial process once again echoed this conversational approach, by bringing together established JLDHE editors with guest editors from across the sector. This blend of perspectives and experiences has become one of the hallmarks of our Collaborative Proceedings, and the editing process continues to evolve and stretch us as editors, writers, and members of the LD community. Working on this year's edition, we were again struck by how the collaborative format creates spaces for voices that might otherwise remain unheard and how each submission finds its own form. Some are rich dialogues between presenter and audience, others are careful reflections that build layer upon layer. There's 'right way' to create these pieces, and that's precisely what makes them so valuable. They capture the authentic voice of our community in all its diversity. As such, the editorial process itself continues to challenge our assumptions about academic publishing. We're not just editing text; we're curating conversations. This requires a different kind of editorial sensitivity – one that preserves the multiplicity of voices while creating coherence for the reader. It's a delicate balance between intervention and preservation.

The success of this approach depends entirely on our community's willingness to engage, to contribute, to risk putting their thoughts and reactions into the shared space. Each contribution, whether a brief comment or an extended reflection, adds another thread to our collective tapestry. Without these threads, without this engagement, the fabric becomes thin, the pattern incomplete. This year's Proceedings once again demonstrate the richness possible when our community embraces this opportunity for genuine dialogue and collaborative meaning-making.

We are very grateful to everyone involved in this collective effort, particularly our guest editors, without whom this work would not have been possible to accomplish: Joy Igiebor, Lisa Wakefield, Amy West, Amina Kebabi, Ann Thanaraj, Anjali Raj Westwood, Anne Preston, Dustin Hosseini, Emily Webb, Laura Dyer, Jessica Cooper, Lim Ooi Wei, Steve

Briggs, Sarune Savickaite, Kathleen Nthakomwa-Cassidy, Steve White, and Rafael Venson. We also thank all the conference participants who actively contributed to these Collaborative Proceedings: without your voices, they would not exist.

Looking ahead to future editions, we see both opportunities and challenges. How can we encourage even broader participation? How might we further develop the collaborative aspects of these proceedings? How can we ensure that these conversations continue to reflect the diversity of our community and the complexity of our practice?

We invite you to engage with these Collaborative Conference Proceedings and Reflections not as finished products but as ongoing conversations, with each piece offering an entry point into important discussions about issues relevant to the practitioners of Learning Development. We hope you will find ideas that resonate, perspectives that provoke, and strategies that provide inspiration for your own practice.

With best wishes,

Alicja Syska

Editor-in-Chief

On behalf of the *JLDHE* Editorial Board and Guest Editors

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