



PAPER

Increasing but insufficient polyphony: are there voices that could further enrich the discussion of LD professional identities?

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ABSTRACT

The development of Learning Development (LD) in the United Kingdom (UK), and its sister disciplines in other countries, has been accompanied by intense conversations and reflection on the professional identities of those involved in it. This paper contributes to these debates by focussing on aspects of LD identities and practice that remain stubbornly uncertain. It argues that the growing consensus in the literature should not distract from questions about how well the literature represents the full community of Learning Developers (LDers). To this end, it reviews current literature on LD identities and practice, focussing on potential limitations to the emerging body of knowledge these publications represent. In response, it develops the rationale for a study among Scottish LDers that addresses some of the aspects currently underrepresented in the literature by including a wider scope of voices and focussing more strongly on practice.

KEYWORDS: professional identities, professional practices, practitioner research, LD in Scotland.

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Introduction

The professional identities of LDers have been the subject of numerous debates. While young professions could be expected to have less clearly delineated profiles, it is notable how long core questions about LD identities and practice have remained contested. Murray and Glass

(2010) began their chapter in *Learning Development in Higher Education* with what they considered 'the fundamental question: what do learning developers do?' (p. 28). At ALDCon 2024, 'uncertainty around professional identity' was still listed among the challenges LDers face in the UK (Kukhareva & Buckley, 2023, p. 1) and similar debates reverberate internationally, as the discussions hosted by Cuthbert and Keenan (2025) at ICALLD's 2025 Symposium demonstrate.

Uncertainty around professional identities and typical practices are related. Although no profession is restricted to a single task, many are characterised by a predominant set of activities, e.g. a maths teacher might do many things in a typical working day, but working directly with learners and teaching them maths is the core activity from which their job title is derived and to which other activities are often related. Following this logic, LDers are people whose profession it is to develop learning, but since both terms are quite broad, this logic does not lead to a clear definition, neither of their identity, nor their core activities. What LDers do and are is not determined by external structures either: LD is not a regulated profession with a clearly defined entry point; unlike many other professions, there is no formal examination determining who can claim this identity (UK Government, n.d.). Moreover, LDers' roles in Higher Education (HE) infrastructure remain characterised by, as Hilsdon (2010) identified over a decade ago, 'employment contracts [that] remain highly variable across the sector' (p. 23).

It seems that defying simple definitions of typical LD activities or LD identities is a defining characteristic of the profession itself. Major changes in HE in the UK have led Fitzmaurice (2013, p. 614) to observe that an 'ongoing process of identity construction and deconstruction in the negotiation of a professional identity in regard to their various roles' is a challenge for HE staff in general. Yet, the variety of LDers' backgrounds, and of the conditions in which they work, compared to many other staff in HE, is likely to complicate the path towards a 'coherent LD identity' (Buckley & Frith, 2023, p. 35) even further, both for individuals and the profession as a whole. The entangled nature of professional LD identities, and the vastly differing intellectual landscapes in which they are formed, results in an additional layer of complexity not necessarily shared in other third space professions.

Exploration of this complexity has led to multiple potential answers, and reflections have multiplied in the decade and a half since Murray and Glass (2010) explored what LDers do.



UK-based professional associations such as the Association of Learning Developers in HE (ALDinHE) and Scottish Higher Education Learning Developers (ScotHELD) have proposed definitions that have, for the former, provided a basis for a professional recognition scheme (ALDinHE, n.d.-a) and an academic journal (ALDinHE, n.d.-b). Publications that see LD as part of a growing group of third space professionals, including the special issue of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* (33), have introduced a new (conceptual) realm for LDers, although Briggs (2025, p. 3) underlines how the ‘additional fuzziness of “third space practitioner” may complicate the issue further’ by introducing an additional ambiguous term of reference that relates more towards a perceived positionality rather than formulated identities. In addition, Simpson (2025) suggests that including a vast variety of third space practitioners can homogenise rather than differentiate and increase understanding of the specific professional identities of LDers.

Similarities between UK definitions and those of practitioners in countries including Aotearoa/New Zealand (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisers in Aotearoa/New Zealand [ATLAANZ]), Australia (Association for Academic Language and Learning [AALL]), Canada (Learning Specialists’ Association of Canada [LSAC]) and South Africa (South African Academic Literacies Practitioners [SAALP]) led to the formation of an international consortium in 2014. The International Consortium of Academic Language and Learning Developers (ICALLD) brings together colleagues working as LDers (in UK terminology, or Tertiary Learning Advisors, Academic Language and Learning Educators or Learning Specialists in other countries) based on ‘shared values and objectives’ (AALL, 2021, p. 1). Conferences, like ALDinHE’s annual event, scholarly publications from PhDs (Bishopp-Martin, 2025; Johnson, 2023) to papers (Stapleford, 2019) and more informal forms of publications, such as blogs (Webster, n.d.; ALDinHE, n.d.-c) have contributed significantly to the debate. The answers to the fundamental questions of what LDers are and do might still not be simple, but the last decades have produced a range of publications that testify to a richly diverse profession.

Aims and outline of the paper

Despite the advances described above, this paper agrees with Bickle et al.’s (2023, p. 245) conclusion that ‘Learning Development remains work in progress’ and that significant questions remain about LD professional identities: what LDers do and know and how this informs their identities (a complex interaction henceforth referred to as ‘identities’).



Stapleford's (2019, p. 1) observation that 'the literature in this area is sparse and to date consists of small-scale surveys of learning development practitioners with inconclusive findings' indicates the continuing rarity of empirical approaches that can support some of the basic tenets of LD work, such as the impact of embedding (Bassett & Macnaught, 2025). Another significant limitation is the small range of authors and questions involved in the debate. As a result, this paper argues for further empirical research. It identifies and raises questions related to LD practices and identities by focussing its literature review firmly on what we do not know about these, yet. From this, it develops the rationale for a comprehensive study that was conducted in response to these limitations to map Learning Development in Scotland. While reporting on the results from this study is beyond the scope of this paper, it outlines why they could be suitable to address current gaps in knowledge.

Overview of what we know about LD professional identities

The publicly visible discourses on LD professional identities introduced above reflect a community of LDers who are deeply committed to the present and future of their profession. As a group, in which the authors would whole-heartedly include themselves, we have collectively created a more defined profession with a clear ethos, focus on students, and emerging signature pedagogy (Webster, 2020b). Before analysing this emerging picture in further detail, we will introduce the lens we use for this review: a conceptualisation of professional identities that recognises various socio-cognitive aspects.

How do we conceptualise professional identities?

At its most intuitive level, a professional identity is shaped by practice: people are bus drivers, nurses or farmers, because they drive buses, provide care or work the land. This intuitive primacy of practice also applies to LDers, because their practice has a direct impact on students' learning and experience, as well as, ideally, on their colleagues and institutions (Burns et al., 2023). Nonetheless, it does not need a field with such varied activities as those of LDers to emphasise that practice is insufficient to define a professional identity. Following a socio-cognitive model (Bandura, 1986), behaviour is shaped by personal and environmental factors. Among personal factors, Bandura counts 'experiential continuity' (Bandura, 2008, p. 22), which, in combination with reflection, can lead to the development of complex, multi-faceted identities. One of those multiple social identities an individual holds can be a



professional identity, which ‘provides the scripts on which individual professionals draw in their daily practice [forming] the practical knowledge that informs [professionals’] action, and the basis of evaluation’ of their practice (Hotho, 2008, p. 730). In other words, the identity of LDers rests as much on what they do on a day-to-day basis, as it does on the knowledge and values that influence them in their ‘commitment to perform competently and legitimately in the context of the profession’ (Tan et al., 2017, p. 1505). As a result, professional identity is ‘dynamic’ and ‘multifaceted’ (Buckley & Frith, 2023, p. 41).

Acknowledging the complexity of professional identity and practice, our enquiry into Learning Development as a profession focuses on professional practice as ‘a lived phenomenon that ... encompasses the doing, knowing, being and becoming of professional practitioners’ (Higgs & Titchen, 2001, p. 5). In the following paragraphs we will examine the ways in which professional associations and individual LDers define the professional practice of this field through the lens of Higgs and Titchen’s (2001, p. 5) approach, as this was developed to explore professional practice in a ‘complex and rapidly changing environment’. We explore LD literature on:

- ‘knowing’, i.e. the knowledge, concepts and assumptions that shape LDers’ practice,
- ‘doing’, i.e. the activities LDers do,
- ‘being’, i.e. LDers’ perception of their role and professional identity, and
- ‘becoming’, i.e. their aspirations for their professional identity.

Literature search

Although not a systematic review, our literature search followed a clear strategy, beginning with the representations of LD professional identities endorsed by the relevant professional associations represented in ICALLD and followed the steps laid out in Table 1.

Table 1. Literature search strategy.

Step	Search location	Search strategy
1	ICALLD members’ websites and documents: AALL, ALDinHE, ATLAANZ, LSCA, SAALP, ScotHELD	Reading to identify sections that define LD professional identity



2	Peer-reviewed journals published by AALL, ALDinHE and ATLAANZ	Search in archives: 'Professional identity', 'Learning Developer', 'Tertiary Learning Advisor', 'LAS', 'Language and Academic Advisor' AND 'identity' AND 'definition'
3	Review of publications widely discussed in LD (associations, email lists)	Familiarity based on discussion of the sources in LD circles (email lists, personal contacts)
4	Material beyond immediate LD context in steps 1-3	Further works cross-referenced in the publications identified in steps 1-3

In the following we analyse the literature we identified through the lens of LD 'knowing', 'doing', 'being' and 'becoming'.

What do we know about LD 'knowing'?

Knowledge relevant to LD stems from 'various complementary theoretical strands' (Slawson & Eyre, 2023, p. 12) and is informed by the wide scope of disciplinary backgrounds and training LDers bring to their work, as well as their complex, unplanned career paths (Samuels, 2025). This wide variety of 'specialised education and training' is acknowledged by some professional associations, e.g. LSAC (n.d., Article 3), and the influence of thinking from disciplines related to LD is considered a strength (Taylor, 2014). Internationally the areas in which different professional associations locate these influences vary to some degree, with a stronger emphasis on education and psychology in Canada (LSAC, n.d.), for example, compared to clearly acknowledged origins in (applied) linguistics in Australia (AALL, n.d.). Attempts to reconcile these influences with a shared core of knowledge vary, too: while over the last five years ATLAANZ has been working towards a list of core competences (Malik, 2021), ALDinHE has chosen to avoid prescribing core knowledge for their professional recognition and to operate with values instead (ALDinHE, n.d.-d). This suggests that LD knowing is characterised by its diversity and, potentially, a tacit core, akin to that of the field 'is so practiced based that bodies of knowledge on which we draw to inform our practice often tend to become invisible even to ourselves' (Percy & Stirling, 2004, p. 56).

An alternative interpretation is that values can be considered a form of 'knowing' as well: 'cognitive representations of basic motivations' (Sagiv & Roccas, 2017, p. 3). Different from



declarative knowledge, they nonetheless serve 'as standards or criteria that provide social justification for choices and behaviours' (Sagiv & Roccas, 2017, p. 4); i.e. knowledge that guides behaviour rather than knowledge about specific behaviours. This form of 'knowing' seems to be essential for LD, as it can be found in the communications of all professional associations, e.g. in the form of 'commitments' (LSAC, n.d.), a list of five values (ALDinHE, n.d.-d) or 'professional ethos' (AALL, 2010). Similarly, individual LDers identify shared values, such as 'social justice, equality, empowerment and inclusivity' as stemming from LD's origins in 'the widening participation agenda' (Webster, 2019a, para. 2).

Values, as an important aspect of LD 'knowing', are accompanied and shaped by a shared conceptualisation of learning and the role language plays in that process, which could be summarised as follows: learning is actively constructed by learners (Webster, 2018a) and an ongoing, lifelong process (LSAC, n.d.). It is frequently mediated and shared through language. The challenge of structuring and communicating learning is inseparable from the disciplinary content (AALL, n.d.) and thus 'forms an integral, neutral and normal part of learning' (Webster, 2023b, para. 14). The history of these conceptualisations is described in the literature (Chanock, 2011a; 2011b), as well as in a study of communication among LDers on the main UK-based mailing list (Stapleford, 2019). These forms of 'knowing' are thus well documented, despite concerns that the working conditions and contracts on which LDers work often hinder a strongly 'scholarship-informed understanding of the very teaching and learning practices that occur there' (Bishopp-Martin & Johnson, 2024, p. 21). Nonetheless Hilsdon's (2018, p. 94) study of 13 LD practitioners cautioned that his participants were 'not [all] equally well informed or engaged in the wider LD community', which raises questions about whether the literature described above reflects the 'knowing' of a wider pool of LDers not directly engaged with the growing body of literature on LD as well.

What do we know about LD 'doing'?

As stated in the introduction, LDers emphasise the 'complex set of multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic roles and functions' (Hilsdon, 2010, p. 14) they take on and the wide scope of activities this involves. Central among them is working with students, whether this is referred to as 'support' or 'teaching'. It is interesting to observe, here, that LDers often work in 'Student Support' services, whereas the index of 2024's *How to Be a Learning Developer in Higher Education* (Syska & Buckley, 2023) contains 47 entries under teaching, but none



under 'support'; a shift that reflects the success of efforts to emphasise the notion (see Hill et al., 2010) that LDers work with students on core aspects of learning at university.

Yet, LDers describe their teaching in a different way to subject lecturers. One of the key differences is the explicit lack of subject expertise, which precludes the traditional focus on teaching content: 'it wasn't my job to have the right answers, it was my job to have the right questions' (Webster, 2019b, para. 5). As a result, LDers see themselves as fellow explorers who can accompany students in their learning process – their 'knowing' and 'doing' results from their 'focus [...] on understanding, exploring and enhancing the university student experience' (ScotHELD, n.d.). In the first instance, this confirms the observations that one of the 'defining characteristics of LD work' is a focus on 'person and process, not product' (Bishopp-Martin & Johnson, 2024, p. 22). This also reveals a particularly interesting mutual influence of 'knowing' and 'doing', the form of 'situated cognition' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) present in communities of practice. As established members of academic communities, LDers can bring this knowledge to explore the learning process. At the same time, this work with students further feeds into their own understanding of this process. In other words, their 'doing', accompanying students in their learning process and observing them, provides an important source of furthering their 'knowing' related to this learning process. Perhaps more so than for traditional disciplines, the teaching elements of their practice provides, alongside more scholarly pursuits, an important source of 'knowing'.

Another way in which LD teaching is set apart from that of subject lecturers is its mostly non-judgemental nature: LD work rarely involves judging or assessing students' progress against set criteria (Webster, 2018b), which opens up spaces in which students can value and reflect on their learning (Webster, 2023a). Rather than focus on immediate learning outcomes, it aims to create a better learning environment by 'help[ing] academics become aware of their own hidden curriculum' (Webster, 2019a, para. 10). That increased awareness can help them reduce the need for students to decipher this hidden curriculum, or improve their chances to 'play the university learning game' (Golding et al., 2015, p. 5). A similar effect can be achieved if LDers directly 'render the hidden curriculum visible to the student – the practices, values, conventions and norms, and help them understand the reasons why it is this way, both legitimate and oppressive' (Webster, 2019a, para. 10).



Creating 'emancipatory spaces for students' (Sinfield et al., 2010, p. 53), where they cannot only 'play the game' (Webster, 2020a, para. 3) but also question the values and assumptions on which it is based, is another way in which an LD approach differs. Referring back to its origin in academic literacies, Webster considers these 'emancipatory values and the characteristic ethos' (2019c, para. 8) as an important element of an LD signature pedagogy. While this originates in concern for students who bring differences, in learning or background, it leads to practice that addresses the learning context and 'reduc[es] barriers to full participation' (Norman & Newham, 2018) rather than 'fixing' the problems of individual learners.

By establishing this connection, these authors emphasise the close link between 'knowing' and 'doing' in their work, where their values shape their 'doing'. This is particularly brought to the fore in the 'collegiate practice' (Sinfield et al., 2010) that LDers undertake with other staff, such as 'Educational Developers, module leaders and other academic and administrative colleagues' (Webster, 2019a, para. 10): when they are 'connecting and collaborating with the wider community' (ALDinHE, 2021) they do not necessarily do entirely different things. Nevertheless, their practice is informed by a different perspective which is strongly influenced by their values and their position of working alongside students, as experts in asking the right questions, rather than providing answers (see above). This unique position could also explain why an Australian study identified the work with students as the greatest source of satisfaction for participants (Malik & Chanock, 2018) even if their work includes many other tasks beyond 'teaching and developing resources for students' (Malik, 2021). This aspect of LD 'doing' seems to be one of the main motivations to be a LDer.

What do we know about LD 'being' and 'becoming'?

Positioning is an important element of LD discourses, focussing mainly on where LDers are ('being') or where they want to be ('becoming'). On the one hand, LDers emphasise that they work 'across the disciplines' (ScotHELD, 2010, p. 6) 'for the whole academic community' (ALDinHE, 2021, p. 1). On the other hand, they are conscious that they do not find themselves at the heart of the university structures, at least not in terms of existing power structures and influence (Bickle et al., 2023). Nonetheless, their dedication to working alongside students (see above) means they actively contest these structures: LD 'is politicised by its own criticality; neutrality is not an option' (ALDinHE, 2021, What is Learning Development? section).



Advocating for 'universities as real-life learning communities', they advocate for different structures built around 'the position of the learners, involving them and offering them an invitation to join in on their own terms, and to comment in their own language, on where they find themselves' (Hilsdon, 2023, p. xviii). In such structures, LDers would be at the centre as well. In other words, LDers see their current being not as a stable 'being' in a place where they want to be, but as active participation in the process of becoming who and where they want to be. Hood's (2023) observation that members of a team have to first come to a consensus before presenting themselves consistently to students and others at the university seems to be reflected in wider published conversations among LDers about their identities, including their 'being' and 'becoming'.

Summary

The negotiation of the professional identities LDers enact (Johnson, 2018) and report in the literature is thus characterised by a prominent teleological element: it is delineated by a wide variety of practice(s) and conceptual approaches, but these are moving towards a shared goal. This development is driven by shared values coalescing around notions of empowerment and social justice. It is informed by a high level of awareness of the ways in which language as well as visible and invisible (power) structures within institutions and curricula can promote or hinder the potential for universities to be(come) 'real-life learning communities' that invite learners to join 'a social and collective enterprise to equip us, and inspire us, and an engine to drive our efforts in confronting ... burning global problems' (Hilsdon, 2023, p. xvii). There is a sense of expectation that greater clarity on the different facets of their professional identities, better articulation of 'what we do, and how and why we do it' (Coulson, 2023, p. 205) allows LDers to communicate their contribution more clearly. This in turn is an important step in 'advocating for the importance of our work' (Coulson, 2023, p. 205). The assumption seems to be that difficulties communicating our professional identities and purpose represent one of the main barriers towards successfully challenging neoliberal understandings of education which counter LD values and underestimate the contribution LD 'knowing' and 'doing' can make.



Potential limits of what we know about LD identities

The persistence of the debate regarding LD professional identities suggests that it might not only be a question of communicating a widely shared understanding of LD professional practice and identities. While external barriers against wider acceptance of the 'knowing' prominent in LD are certainly strong, it seems necessary to question whether the problems could also be due to lack of wide-ranging consensus within the LD community: do the discourses on LD 'knowing', 'doing', 'being' and 'becoming' reviewed above reflect the desired and actual practices of the wider majority or solely of a highly engaged group of LDers? Does their scholarship 'shape and maintain ... the professional identity' (Bishopp-Martin & Johnson, 2024, p.157) of those who participate in these debates, or of the wider community in LD jobs? Cameron (2018b) rightly notes that the number of 106 from an email list of over 250 Tertiary Learning Advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand is one of the limitations of their extensive survey, because it captures a limited range of practitioners. Below we will explore the question of how well the international literature reviewed presents the full community of people currently working as LDers.

Potential doubts about the degree to which the literature represents the wider community of practising LDers are nourished by various observations. One is the range of authors: despite the impressive line-up of writers included in Syska and Buckley's (2023) collection, *How to be a Learning Developer in HE*, and the range of authors publishing in the journals of the professional associations identified above, the number of authors is still much smaller than that of people working in LD posts. This could be an indication that the silent majority is simply rallying behind these more vocal authors. Alternatively, could the lack of questions about the extent of agreement be interpreted as a sign of what Dhillon (2023) identified as a resistance to critical inquiry, as a defence mechanism in response to lack of recognition of expertise and often precarious employment? Do provocations, such as Richards and Pilcher's (2023), that attack generic study skills (rather than actual LD practice) offer uncomfortable insight regarding how some HE colleagues perceive the value of what we do? Or do such perceptions touch raw nerves as they echo the kind the language and tensions many of us are forced to negotiate, to varying levels of success, within our own institutions? Perhaps this is not what we, the engaged LDers who contribute to the literature reviewed above, actually do. But could it describe the approaches of some of the practices that are common under the LD banner, whether these are imposed by external pressure (see the notion of prescribed



identities in (Johnson, 2018) or favoured by colleagues who do not subscribe to the professional identities represented in LD literature?

This impression is supported by our own experience, and based on conversations with colleagues across Scotland, the UK, and internationally. How easy or difficult is it to think of at least two of your colleagues who are not engaging in professional development or related scholarship? How many LD structures or practices that seem to promote a study skills approach could you name without much time for thought? If our experience is indeed shared by many colleagues, the uncertainty over LD professional identities might not result entirely from external lack of recognition but could also be partly attributed to a wider range of LD practices that do not necessarily reflect the discourses on LD professional identities present in the literature. Such a potential blind spot in our understanding of the wider range of LD 'knowing', 'doing', 'being' and 'becoming' is important. As Hood (2023, p. 200) states: 'we need to "own" our area of professional expertise and identity' to be successful as LDers. To own it, we argue, includes understanding what it is across a wide spectrum of practitioners working as LDers. In this spirit, we argue for further research to increase our understanding of the full scope of LD 'knowing', 'doing', 'being' and 'becoming', including the views of those who rarely engage with the wider LD community.

Research into other voices

The need to gain a wider understanding of the role LDers play was recognised almost 30 years ago in Australia, when Alex Barthel initiated a regular survey of Academic Language and Learning advisors (Barthel et al., 2021), which collected information on the infrastructure of Academic Language and Learning staff in Australian universities until 2015. An update from 2020/2021 then gave insight into longer term developments of the number of staff, their posts and the broad areas in which they worked (AALL, n.d.; Ashton-Hay et al., 2021). This overview of institutional structures that shape LDers 'being' and, through changes over time, 'becoming' in Australia was complemented by a study that also collected insights into the 'subjective picture of how they feel about their position and its implications for their sense of purpose, possibility, and satisfaction in their work' (Malik & Chanock, 2018, p. A-15). A major study in Aotearoa New Zealand (Cameron, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c) echoed this focus on 'being' by including questions about Tertiary Learning Advisors' specific posts, their perception of the



benefits and challenges of their work, as well as added information about their professional background and personal characteristics.

While these studies provide insights into LDers' 'being' and 'becoming', the information they provide on 'doing' and 'knowing' is far more limited, including mainly information about the wider areas of teaching LDers engage in, such as EAP, writing or maths and stats and the form in which they engage with students, such as one-to-ones versus group teaching. The combination of open and closed questions in the Aotearoa New Zealand study allows participants to identify sources for job satisfaction and challenges freely, but the focus on external conditions and these specific aspects of 'being' is mainly predetermined. These studies partially address the problem that publications on LD identities represent the view of a dedicated group, by including a wider range of practitioners in the HE systems where they were conducted. Nonetheless, they do not fully include questions about other aspects of LD professional identities, specifically related to 'knowing' and 'doing'.

Rationale for mapping LD in Scotland

We interpreted the review of relevant literature and previous studies, as well as our own professional experience, as a call for a wider study to explore the professional practice and identities of LDers. The aim of this study was to follow the existing studies in trying to capture the widest range of active practitioners possible but increases the scope of its questions to include more opportunities for LDers to report their perception of LD, specifically the more neglected aspects of 'knowing' and 'doing'. In the remainder of this paper, we outline how the conclusions drawn from the review presented above shaped the Mapping LD in Scotland study (Canton & Cuthbert, 2023), which was initiated in response to this need. As will become obvious, the scope and spirit of the study defy reporting results in a single paper.

Sampling strategy

The geographical location chosen was Scotland, as this offers a context that is sufficiently diverse to offer a broad range of LD practice (compared to choosing a single city, for example), while being small enough to make approaching all LDers working within its boundaries feasible. Scotland's HE system is clearly distinct from that of the other UK nations in various respects, most notably the length of degrees and funding system (see UK ENIC, 2023), which sets clear boundaries for inclusion or exclusion of LDers in the study as anyone



working in a higher education institution (HEI) that delivers degrees according to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SQA, n.d.).

Furthermore, the realisation in the realm of a smaller professional association like ScotHELD opened up the possibility of running the study like a community project, i.e. to collect and share data for the benefit of all, rather than individual researchers. Any member of ScotHELD has access to the full data set (following initial data cleaning to remove names where participants prefer anonymity, for example) and various working groups were set up to explore the relevance of the data for different purposes, from research to influencing policy and practice. This approach shifts the emphasis from a purely research-oriented focus to one that creates data for a wider range of purposes, such as comparing provision in one's own institution to that elsewhere, which is likely to better reflect the priorities of a greater number of LDers. This community-focused approach was likely to increase the response rate to calls for participation, which was further increased by using snowballing, which moved from members of the ScotHELD email list, i.e. colleagues already engaged with the community, to personal communication with LDers who were not included on the list, as well as LD units in institutions not active in the association. Thus, colleagues at all 19 HEIs in Scotland were invited to participate.

Rationale for questions

To balance the ambitious scope of the project with the amount of effort involved for individual participants, the project used two surveys: one that captures LD structures in the relevant institutions and was given to each LD unit (group survey), and one that focuses on individual professional practice and identities for each LDer (individual survey). To reflect the community spirit of the project, the invitation to answer the questions about LD posts and their location in the institution was sent to all LDers in each unit with the call to decide on the best format to respond, whether as a group or by choosing a suitable representative.

The individual survey then allows the variety of practices and roles in a unit to be captured, as each participant answers questions related to 'doing' and 'being' (how and when they work with students, in which constellations, and on which aspects of learning or communicating this learning). It also explicitly encourages participants to define, in their own words, what the salient aspects of their professional identity are by including an open question that asks for a definition of their role in their own words, and to consider the knowledge that shapes their



practice. Given the prominent role academic literacies play in the literature, further questions about its role in LDers' practice were added.

Conclusion

The database created through the Mapping LD in Scotland project (Canton & Cuthbert, 2023) thus includes information from 14 HEIs and 1 FE college on the 'being', 'knowing' and 'doing' that shape LD professional identities. The data range from information about specific LD activities (where they are situated in institutional structures, how they are delivered and which student groups they target) to information about the knowledge that underlies these activities. The scope of the database means it defies simple summary as much as LD defies simple definition, but engagement with specific questions on LD 'being', 'knowing' and 'doing' can spark reflection on the identities we want to have. As a community project whose data was made available to all those who contributed to it, it encourages formal research projects to interrogate the data on LD professional practice and identity but also offers individuals and institutions a point for comparison for their own practice. An example of the former is a closer examination of the nexus between 'doing' and 'knowing'. Even in the absence of explicit data on LD 'becoming' in this data set, such work on increasing our understanding of the current state of LD identities can lead to a clearer awareness of the opportunities and barriers involved in shaping LD in the future.

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