



LETTERS

A 'room of one's own' in learning development: establishing spaces for writing for new learning developers

Joy Igiebor 

Birkbeck, University of London, UK

ABSTRACT

This speculative essay uses Virginia Woolf's metaphor of a 'room of one's own' to explore whether Learning Development (LD), as a field, provides effectual physical and figurative spaces whereby new learning developers (LDers) feel empowered to write their authentic selves into professional 'being'. Drawing upon scholarly work into the professional identity of LDers, it argues that collaborative (and communal) shared 'rooms' or spaces 'designed' specifically for new LDers will enable them to develop confidence in contributing their written thoughts to the wider LD community.

KEYWORDS: writing, writing spaces, new learning developers, professional identity, learning development, scholarship.

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Introduction

You might be familiar with Virginia Woolf, a prolific English modernist writer, and feminist, of the post-Victorian era. In 1928, Woolf delivered well-received lectures at the University of Cambridge's women's only colleges in which she elucidated on the importance of women having a secure and private space (both physically and figuratively) in which to write, at the time a privilege often afforded only to men with status (Gewirtz, 2011). That series of lectures was later recorded in an essay collection titled *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1929/2020).

In this essay, I use the metaphor of a 'room of one's own' to explore whether Learning Development (LD), as a field, provides effectual physical and figurative spaces whereby new learning developers (LDers) feel empowered to write their authentic selves into professional 'being'. Drawing upon scholarly work into the professional identity of LDers, I argue that establishing specific spaces for writing for new and 'establishing' LDers can aid them to find 'a way in' to pedagogical 'rooms of their own' which might initially appear inaccessible. The notion of 'rooms of their own' does not imply new LDers should work in siloes. Rather, I argue that collaborative (and communal) shared 'rooms' or spaces 'designed' specifically for new LDers will enable them to develop confidence in contributing their written thoughts to the wider LD community.

The fluidity of professional identity

Our professional identities are strongly intertwined with personal experience, the context in which we work and the stage of our career; that is, our identities are multi-faceted, fluid, and context-specific (Buckley & Frith, 2024). In conceptualising our professional identity, we can ask critically reflective questions of our professional selves. These might be questions of an internal nature. For instance, we may pose questions about our personal values or how we perceive ourselves as a professional. The questions might also be more externally focused or situated (Murray & Male, 2005, as cited in Buckley & Frith, 2024, p. 34); for instance, we may ask questions about how to improve the effectiveness of our LD practice, or what the impact of our work might be on students, or how others (such as students or colleagues) perceive us. Either category of questions can function as both filter and compass, directing our professional behaviours, establishing, and reflecting back to us our professional selves.

Buckley and Frith (2024) propose a five-stage networking model in which LDers' professional identity may transition from 'a marginal role of low networking capital' to expert, a role with 'high networking capital' (Buckley & Frith, 2024, p. 35). These stages, they posit, are fluid and can shift according to context and experience. By the nature of position, newer LDers are likely to identify as 'novice' operating a 'marginal role' on the outskirts of their team or 'sphere of influence' (Buckley & Frith, 2024, p. 35). That is, establishing LDers may not yet be able to fully articulate their value in the field. They, ostensibly, do not yet have the networking capital. This dilemma, perhaps, is emblematic of the field of LD itself. It operates in a 'third space' (Whitchurch, 2008), straddling the line between academia and professional services and still



has work itself to do to establish a 'room of one's own' in the wider higher education context. Given these contextual issues, how then might specific writing spaces aid newer LDers—or those new to writing in LD—to feel empowered to occupy and take up 'room' in the LD community?

Writing to 'take up space'

Opportunities to write in the field of LD abound. For instance, within the immediate ALDinHE community, options for writing include the ALDinHE *#Take5* blog and the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE)*. However, for newer LDers without a clear sense of their professional value, it can be difficult to find the confidence to submit to such publications. This is so even with significant guidance, structure and support offered through formal (or informal) mentorship and support from the *JLDHE* and *#Take5* editing teams.

Writing involves exposing our thought processes on paper (Zinsser, 1976/2006). It opens us up to perceived judgement and can leave us feeling vulnerable. Established writers might have worries about the writing process; however, experience will likely reduce the fear of submitting writing for publication. For newer LD writers, this sense of the unknown may potentially deter them from submitting their writing altogether. However, writing is 'a way in' for newer LDers in the community to communicate ideas, thoughts and research that might be of significant value to the field. So how might we reconcile this?

A reconciliation

One approach to encourage a diversity of perspectives might be to establish specific online or physical writing spaces (rooms of their own) where newer LDers can share in a collaborative way their concerns, joys, and tribulations around the writing process. For instance, shared writing sessions for new LDers leading to collaborative writing for publication could be perceived as lower stakes/less daunting. A special issue of *JLDHE* inviting submissions specifically from new or emerging LDers who have not yet published, with the provision that they will receive sustained support and feedback through the process by established writers/editors, might encourage new voices. A series of peer writing workshops designed specifically for newer LDers who are interested in writing for publication could establish another 'room'.



The above are initial thoughts and are in no way exhaustive. The point is to highlight that such approaches might help to garner and encourage more writing from newer LDers who may feel unsure of how to add their voice to what might be perceived as a field saturated with ideas, innovation, and experience.

Conclusion

This experimental essay posited that establishing 'rooms of their own' for newer LDers to write could aid with promoting confidence to submit for publication. Whilst Woolf was not writing about LD, the essay extended her analogy of 'a room of one's own' to reflect and speculate on how new LDers can be encouraged to establish their own (collaborative) 'writing rooms'. It suggested several approaches that might be taken such as shared writing sessions or targeted writing workshops. The point is that hearing from an array of voices, including new entrants to the profession, aids to promote LD as a field that reflects the diversity of voices and perspectives that exist within it.

Certainly, writing does not always have to be published. The act of writing is valuable in itself, regardless of whether others read it. It can serve as a useful means to reflect and to develop a sense of professional identity for both new and established LDers. However, if you are a new LDer (or new to writing as a LDer) and you believe that you have something worth sharing with the wider LD community, I encourage you to find spaces to develop your writing voice. It will be worth it.

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Author details

Joy Igiebor is a Learning Development Tutor for Birkbeck Law School and the School of Creative Arts, Culture and Communication at Birkbeck, University of London. She has interests in teaching and research related to academic writing, critical approaches to pedagogy, and learning developers' identity and professional development. She is a Fellow of ALDinHE, an Advance HE Fellow (FHEA), and a member of the ALDinHE CPD Working Group. Joy is the author of *Doing Learning Development in Higher Education: A Practical Guide for New and Early Career Learning Developers* published by Routledge in 2026.

ORCID

Joy Igiebor  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8989-641X>

