



REVIEW

From theory to practice: walking the walk of learning development in higher education

Igiebor, J. (2026). *Doing learning development in higher education: A practical guide for new and early career learning developers*. Routledge. ISBN 9781032991726

Matthew Clark^a , Sophie V Ellis^b 

^aManchester Metropolitan University, UK, ^bUniversity of Bristol, UK

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Joy Igiebor's *Doing Learning Development in Higher Education: A Practical Guide for New and Early Career Learning Developers* offers a comprehensive toolkit for newcomers to learning development. Much more than a 'how to teach' book, it explores the world of the learning developer in its entirety, providing candid guidance on the day-to-day practice of learning development, drawn from Igiebor's seven years of experience in the role. Transcending the practical, the book accompanies its example lesson plans, case studies, and reading lists with advice on maintaining self-care, tackling impostor syndrome, and building professional community. It is Igiebor's holistic approach to learning development that emerges as the book's greatest strength.

Doing Learning Development in Higher Education occupies a similar intellectual space to Hilsdon's (2011) exploration of learning developers' contributions within the wider university and Briscoe and Olson's (2024) autoethnographic examination of how learning developers negotiate the relationship between professional nomenclature, identity, and values. Like Grayson and Syska's (2024) consideration of the hybrid learning developer, Igiebor's book focuses on the everyday practices of learning development in close detail, while accommodating the different institutional and role contexts of her readers. Importantly, she

combines reflection on the nature of the role with the practical examples and guidance familiar to readers of Burns and Sinfield (2016) and Cottrell (2020).

Though Igiebor reassures readers that there is no obligation to read the book from cover to cover, her compassionate tone invites uninterrupted reading of its 10 chapters. Those returning to the book for specific guidance will find each chapter devoted to a distinct aspect of the role: while the opening chapters (Chapters 1–3; pp. 1–43) situate the role within the broader context of higher education (HE), the middle chapters (Chapters 4–8; pp. 44–174) cover teaching and planning across workshops, one-to-one tutorials, and sessions embedded into credit-bearing modules. The final chapters (Chapters 9–10; pp. 175–204) explore avenues for professional development, enabling the reader to take its contents into their future careers.

Learning developers embarking on their first teaching experiences will certainly find value in Chapter 4, which outlines not only the mechanics of running a tutorial, but also considers the micro-decisions involved in discussing the remit of the role with others during a session. For example, students may assume that the learning developer can advise on course content much like a programme tutor, and knowing how to correct this assumption can be especially difficult when new to the role. The advice in Chapter 4 on self-disclosure, alongside Chapter 8's discussion of communicating with students, may help readers to appreciate that honesty about the non-specialist nature of the role is likely to draw curiosity rather than suspicion from students. Igiebor also addresses the interpersonal dimension of the tutor-student interaction and its bearing on feelings of inclusion and belonging. Supported by succinct chapter summaries, exemplars, and visuals, Igiebor takes great care to model the principles of inclusion and accessibility of which she speaks.

Chapter 7 is likely to become one of the book's most frequently consulted sections due to its focus on example learning materials. By pairing sample teaching resources with contextualised case studies, Igiebor eschews a 'trial-and-error' approach to make visible the links between rationale, design, and delivery. For instance, Igiebor uses concept cartoons to initiate discussion around scenarios in which multiple perspectives may arise, demonstrating how this activity might complement the use of breakout rooms or be developed into further activities where students create their own concept cartoons to explore their own stance. From an initial idea, the reader is guided through successive steps for developing a series of



engaging activities. In our experience as learning developers, concept cartoons often elicit strong engagement through their visual presentation of contrasting perspectives. Igiebor's suggested extensions offer valuable opportunities to deepen students' critical exploration of those perspectives. The chapter also provides sound advice that acknowledges the time and creative constraints faced by new learning developers. One suggested task is to browse popular resources available on the LearnHigher website, with a view to selecting useful materials and adapting them to intended learning outcomes for sessions. This encourages new learning developers to engage with alternative ways of designing sessions while retaining ownership of their resourcing decisions. A similar approach is promoted in advice about judicious use of digital tools, where Igiebor suggests keeping learning outcomes in focus and avoiding exclusive reliance on any particular tool, while also leaning on the experience of close colleagues and digital education specialists to facilitate good pedagogic practice. Igiebor moves beyond general suggestions, sharing the specific platforms available within her institution, as well as suitable resources for digital upskilling.

Further signposting throughout the book directs readers to resources from professional bodies, such as the UK-based Association for Learning Development in Higher Education's (ALDinHE) collective diary, which inspires learning developers to contribute to and read other 'day-in-the-life' diary entries. By including excerpts from the collective diary among the appendices, Igiebor introduces new learning developers to the wider learning development community. Spotlighting six entries from different points in the academic year, Igiebor captures the diversity of practice across institutions, student populations, and professional contexts.

Though the book is primarily aimed at those new to the field, learning developers at all career stages are likely to discover valuable insights for their practice. Igiebor's ChatGPT-generated quiz for students, for example, which is shared in the appendices, is generated using specific prompts and with careful checking of the accuracy of the information the questions are based on. This also sparks pertinent conversations around the ethical, environmental, and intellectual property implications of using generative AI in learning development, all of which are important issues for established and emerging learning developers alike. Elsewhere, Igiebor's advice around impact, which includes specific suggestions in Chapter 4 of what can be measured (this is elaborated upon in Chapter 5), gives pause for thought for seasoned



learning developers. Her reminder that impact can also be seen in terms of positive interactions and a 'lightbulb moment' (p. 69), serves as a reminder of the broader purpose and human value of the learning developer. Caring and thoughtful in form, as much as content, the book concludes with the suggestion that learning developers might embrace 'the normalcy of making mistakes', with failure becoming a 'positive learning tool to continue developing and growing' in the field (p. 203).

Igiebor does not claim to speak for all learning developers, however, and her articulation of the diverse routes into the field anticipates the specific challenges that learning developers entering the field from different professional backgrounds might face. As we reviewed the book, we reflected on our own routes into learning development, from secondary teaching and academia, respectively. An academic background does not necessarily negate the issue of impostor syndrome (pp. 152–154), and Igiebor addresses this topic further in the section 'How do I work effectively with students when I am not a specialist in their subject?' (p. 164). A transition from teaching may require adjustment to the HE sector more broadly. The skills that one might assume are tried and tested among secondary teachers—managing behaviour, focusing on progress, and communicating with colleagues—are often navigated differently in university contexts, a shift that Igiebor captures in Chapter 5. For example, Igiebor's suggestions for working with students who might monopolise discussion, or not contribute at all, are tailored to the learning developer's non-hierarchical position, which is characterised by a partnership approach to work rather than the processes of grading and determining progress that are a part of the lecturer role (p. 14). Similarly, Chapter 8 prepares the reader for the collaborative working that is so fundamental in support roles, where the skills of working with staff from different areas of the university are a significant aspect of the role, requiring clear boundaries and advocating for learning development provision.

Given the range of teaching, academic, and strategic skills required in learning development, it is unsurprising that new recruits enter the profession from academia, secondary, and further education, support services, and other professional backgrounds. Nevertheless, by capturing this diversity, Igiebor draws attention to the 'third space' that learning development occupies within contemporary HE. While acknowledging this positioning can lead to misconceptions of the role among students and academics alike, she contends that this in-betweenness is one of its strengths, offering variety, personal fulfilment, and the opportunity to shape the role from



within. Furthermore, she emphasises that learning developers, occupying a 'mediating role' (p. 14) between students and academics, are integral to sector-wide efforts to promote equity, widening participation, and student retention. Bringing learning development from the peripheries of HE to the centre of discussions about student success, Igiebor makes a compelling case for the recognition of this continually evolving discipline. In doing so, *Doing Learning Development in Higher Education* emerges as a persuasive demonstration of learning development in practice, a book that truly 'walks the walk'.

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Author details

Matthew Clark is an Academic and Study Skills Tutor at Manchester Metropolitan University. Prior to this, he taught English in a large independent school in Leeds, during which time he was departmental mentor to a number of new teachers. His duties included teaching A-Level English Literature students, many of whom have gone on to study the subject at university. In 2022, he completed his MLitt in English Literature at Newcastle University after studying part-time.

Sophie V Ellis is a Lecturer in French Visual Cultures at the University of Bristol and a former Academic and Study Skills Tutor at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on contemporary art as a vehicle for welcome in France and beyond. This work, for which Sophie was awarded a PhD in French Studies from Newcastle University, culminated in *We All Came Here From Somewhere* (2024–2025), a large-scale exhibition at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. More broadly, she writes about identity, technology, and power, with her current research examining AI-generated cultural production as a site for the renegotiation of 'Frenchness' in the digital age.

ORCID

Matthew Clark  <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8869-4929>

Sophie V Ellis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7049-4550>

