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Professional identity and the LD project podcast

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Presentation abstract

The Learning Development Project podcast was established in summer 2022 to open up the conversation around writing in Learning Development, as we believe that publication should not be the end of the story. We always ask our guests about their relationship with writing since part of the reason we invite them onto the podcast is because they have written something that has resonated with colleagues or had impact on practice. They are writers, and we invite them in that capacity. But how do we see ourselves? And how do others see us? We are writers, authors, podcasters, academics, leaders, colleagues, editors, amongst other labels. However, while there are certain stable aspects to our self-identity, there are less stable ones – such as being a writer – that need to be constantly negotiated. If writing is an important aspect of your identity, how do you get others to see that importance, and support it?

The questions posed for exploration in the session included:

- How far is writing a part of your professional identity?
- What role does writing play in how you see yourself?
- How important is it in terms of how others see you?

Keywords: writing; identity; scholarship; community.

Community response

The community response included ideas around the dual aspects of the podcast: who should we, the LD community, hear from, and what would we like the LD community to communicate outwards into the world? The podcast enables the community to hear voices within (and beyond?) the LD world, and gives space for conversation about the act of writing and publishing as well as the ideas those authors have shared through their writing. It also encourages the community to write. In addition, as a public outlet for LD, it can share voices to support and develop the identity of LD.

There is no doubt that the podcast is offering a really interesting space for LD conversations to take place. The guests so far have been so interesting. I mentioned at the time that authors of books covering Learning Development topics would be good guests – perhaps Tom Chatfield, Kate Williams or, I have recently found out that Richard E Mayer, whose work on multimedia learning has been very influential on my teaching and practice, has brought out a book *How to Be a Successful Student: 20 Study Habits Based on the Science of Learning*, which would be great to dig deeper into with him – transatlantic interviews are the norm now surely 😊.

I had looked forward to this, having enjoyed and been so impressed by the podcast (for the reasons outlined above), and was definitely not disappointed. The discussion during our 'round' of the mini-keynote session centred largely, and more generally, on the role of scholarship and scholarly activity, both in the promotion of LD, and in the careers and professional identities of LDers themselves. There was a certain, and understandable, tension and ambivalence surrounding the latter issue. This stemmed from the fact that many existing or would-be LDers would not necessarily welcome an increased expectation of engagement in more traditionally recognised scholarly activities like writing for publication even if this was supported more (e.g., in contracts) in the first place. By the same token, it is clear that engagement in scholarship, in a variety of forms, really will be central to helping LD realise its transformative vision for HE, and in making the profession itself more robust and resilient. If nothing else this helps underscore the importance of continuing to build on the work ALDinHE is already doing (not least, via the LD Project Podcast) to champion and nurture scholarship in a variety of forms.

I am so pleased the podcast offers another avenue for dissemination and engagement with LD work.

Next steps and additional questions

The participant's point that the LD Project Podcast is able 'to champion and nurture scholarship in a variety of forms' is such a joyous and celebratory position. It feels like the podcast does much to celebrate and support the journey we take as writers. Do the authors ever consider asking less experienced writers to share their experiences? The richness of experience and expertise we gain through hearing from established writers is so valuable, and, building on the comment made above, are there other avenues we can benefit from here? Perhaps guests who have just written their first article, and can share how this has impacted their writing identity? Or even talking about writing a blog or other forms of academic writing?

Authors' reflection

We are both so glad that the podcast is finding such an appreciative audience, particularly as we enjoy hosting it so much! We are grateful for the suggestions to follow up and keen to make the second year even better than the first.

The discussions round the table carried a different flavour with each iteration, reflecting the multiplicity of feelings around and perspectives to take on writing. For some of our participants, any writing considered as a performative action – that which was required by a job, or seemingly for its own sake – provokes deep resistance and ambivalence. However, equally (and sometimes in the same people), writing can be creative and meditative, bringing satisfaction from crafting and completing a piece. Each group of participants agreed that writing for publication was a means of personal growth and professional recognition and thus could bring us credibility, whilst also leaving us with a sense of vulnerability, exposure and potential confrontation. This is essentially why we wanted to connect the podcast with writing and identity: we see all three as mutually reinforcing, with the podcast acting as an entryway to writing for the individual, and a

means of supporting the development of a community identity; through our writing we write ourselves, and the podcast brings audience and author together.

Writing is not a simple act, nor always a comfortable one. However, it is one that engages both writer and audience, including listeners, in an ongoing conversation, and if we can encourage more people to get involved in that conversation we will consider it a job well done.

For that very reason, it is an excellent idea to invite a new author onto the podcast to talk about their first article. Taking that step into publication is a huge one and it should be celebrated. We've both experienced rejections from editors and lists of changes and clarifications requested by reviewers; we know what a lot of work it takes to get a piece of writing across the publication finishing line. And despite their different processes, the same is true for other forms of publications too, such as blog posts; for that reason, we have a couple of bloggers, or self-publishers, lined up already for the podcast. We want to recognise the importance of *dissemination*, not necessarily of *journals*, and to acknowledge all those who help map out the boundaries of our field.

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