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From the conference and beyond: collaborative writing with the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education and the learning development community

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Presentation abstract

This workshop set out the process of collaborative writing explored by the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE)* editorial teams in partnership with the ALDinHE community at and following ALDCon22 through The Collaborative Conference Proceedings and Reflections. We discussed how the collaborative writing venture gave presenters an opportunity to open up their work to community responses and to document their experience of this dialogue with the Learning Development community. We described how, using their conference abstract and Google docs, presenters engaged with their audiences to record live responses to their work, to reflect and respond to these responses, and to generate ideas in respect to taking their research forward or enhancing

their practice. We examined how working with the *JLDHE* on this collaborative writing venture gave presenters an innovative way to open up a dialogue with our community of readers, providing a unique opportunity to extend their conference conversations in a way that shapes Learning Development practice for the future.

In the session, we shared the steps involved in the collaborative writing process and invited questions and reflections. Using testimonials from writers who participated last year, we opened up discussion and sought to reassure and address any concerns in the community with editors and writers who have previously negotiated some of these challenges. We welcomed community input into how to make the Collaborative Proceedings more inclusive and open, to benefit all those who wish to be involved in the future.

Attendees participated in shaping the collaborative partnership going forwards; they left with an understanding of what it means to be involved, a sense of how this innovative work enriched their conference experience, and how it is being received across the sector.

Keywords: collaborative writing; community; reflection.

Community response

The response to this session was strong, with praise both for the session itself, and for the overarching approach to innovating community and conference responses to the conference:

As someone who participated in the collaborative writing last year, I was interested to hear about the mechanics, editorial process, and uniqueness of ALDinHE's collaborative writing venture. We were given the opportunity to discuss between delegates and the use of individual examples was ideal for directing and shaping the discussion. Talking and feeding back to the presenters not only clarified certain aspects for us but also shaped how I am approaching the experience this year.

There was a very productive, enthusiastic atmosphere created by the workshop, with a strong sense of community.

The support for the journal was clear in other comments:

This was a great workshop. I participated last year and I will be doing it again this year! Thanks for all the effort that goes into making the journal an inclusive, innovative and exciting place to publish in!’

I participated in this last year – both as a presenter and someone who commented on my reflections – and it was interesting to hear why this idea came about. I think this is a great initiative getting people into publishing in a less daunting way. It also makes us take time out to reflect upon what we have learned and what we will take away with us.

Finally, one participant noted that:

The collaborative writing exercise was immensely valuable to me last year and this year. It has helped me not just to have ideas wash over me but to consider and apply them. A couple of ideas for the future: ALDinHE could supply a standard slide to presenters who are taking part on the collaborative writing exercise to highlight that it is happening and encourage participation. There could also be a virtual writing retreat on a specific date where ALDinHE members are encouraged to gather and write together.

Editorial comment

Analysing the community response to a session explaining the community-led approach feels like somewhat of a meta-approach, however, the strong support evident in the responses clearly shows how and why this innovative approach works. It was interesting to see one respondent comment that this might be a way in to publishing – and this is worth celebrating and promoting to encourage early career researchers to enjoy and embrace

the community and network-building potential of the conference experience, which for many of us, remains a little daunting in a post-Covid landscape.

Next steps and additional questions

It is worth noting that the majority of the community response focused on the acknowledgement of the impact and usefulness of this approach in their second year partaking in the conference. Could this indicate that the first experience is less clear to new audiences? Perhaps it would be worth recruiting guest editors in advance of the conference start, who might approach the conference, or indeed attend specific allocated sessions, with the mindset of encouraging participation, community responses, and also drawing on their own primary evidence in terms of the experience. Similarly, as our final community member comments above, adding in slides from presenters requesting feedback to engage with would also remind everyone to participate in a reflective mindset.

Authors' reflection

CB: Thank you for the lovely feedback. This workshop was a pleasure to run thanks to the enthusiasm of the participants; the note above about having a sense of community is exactly the tone that the Journal wishes to convey generally. It is interesting that one participant mentioned writing retreats, as they share a similar basis in what Knowles (2016) has termed 'generous scholarship', a means for building and strengthening networks through the development of identity, mediated through writing together. Although the process of collaborating through these conference proceedings is asynchronous and dispersed, it still has the potential to carry this form of generosity in the way we can share the experience and our ideas, through writing.

All too often, although we can be inspired and invigorated whilst at a conference, that feeling quickly fades on returning back to the day-to-day demands of our job. As an Editorial team, we wanted to find a way to keep this conversation going beyond the conference and draw more participants into the *JLDHE*, whether as a guest editor or as a contributor to these proceedings. Receiving such enthusiastic feedback that suggests we

are achieving our goals is hugely rewarding. I think it just goes to show that having the opportunity to exchange impressions, gain clarification, share experiences, join forces – as we did here in the workshop, and so we are doing in the collaborative proceedings themselves – has great value beyond each individual act. This is our chance to be part of something bigger and contribute to an endeavour that by its very nature we could not achieve alone.

LF: This was a special session for me, as it enabled the Editorial Board to present the collaborative proceedings, not as a proposal, but as something that had already had a full run and was becoming an established part of the conference and journal. I remember how unfamiliar the territory was for us all as we began to work on the first proceedings. It took time to find what worked, but we always kept the reader in mind, thinking: What would I need to know if I was not there? Reflecting on what we produced, I am so immensely proud as I can see how the articles would expand access to the fantastic scholarship within the Learning Development community, enabling people to benefit from the work of the wonderful ALDinHE Annual Conference presenters.

Having undertaken one of the collaborative proceedings before, in this session we were able to engage attendees using sample articles from our proceedings last year, facilitating a conversation about community and collaborative writing. It was brilliant to see how this dialogue evolved, with the community contributions reflecting on the process. It was particularly nice to hear from authors and commenters who had participated in the proceedings last year and many of those experiences are captured in the community response above. Thank you for your contributions everyone.

On a personal note, the proceedings represent how I became involved in the journal as an editor. Seeing them come around again is closer to marking my first year as part of the Editorial Board. I have really enjoyed working with other colleagues on the Editorial Board – and I cannot wait to see how we continue to evolve as an editorial team – as will our authors and audience evolve. Ultimately, we are all writing Learning Development into existence and the conference proceedings, for me, present a vital opportunity to capture practice in the moment. With the proceedings, the journal is doing something genuinely

different, innovative and exciting. It was so nice to see recognition of that from attendees, as well as further ideas on how we can take this forward.

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