The five Ps of LD: Using formulation in Learning Development work for a student-centred approach to 'study skills'

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Abstract

Learning Development is a field of practice concerned with supporting students to develop their study skills, including academic and assessment literacies. It is strongly rooted in values that are student-centred, collaborative and emancipatory rather than remedial or deficit. However, in the wider dominant culture of UK HE institutions, Learning Developers are often placed in an implicitly hierarchical relationship with students, "giving advice and guidance", at odds with these values. Without a clear model for practice to help them enact their values in a student-centred and dialogic way, Learning Developers may risk pathologizing the student, depriving them of agency and expertise, in an overly prescriptive and instrumental approach to skills development. This paper explores formulation, a core skill in Clinical Psychology, and its applicability in Learning Development. Formulation is a method of integrating theory and practice, clinical expertise with the client's own experience and insight, through its meaning to the client. With a focus on equality, person-centred practice and co-created meaning, it is well aligned to Learning Development values. This paper examines how formulation can be adapted for Learning Development one-to-one work and other forms of provision, and proposes a practical model, the Five Ps of LD, which integrates multiple perspectives with longitudinal, cross-sectional and socio-cultural factors into a holistic shared understanding of the Learning Development need.

Practitioner Notes

1. As a values-driven profession, Learning Development (as practised in the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand) has much to offer skills development in the post-pandemic, inclusive university, but needs to develop concrete models for practice to fulfil this potential.

2. Without such models, Learning Developers' practice risks becoming remedial, deficit and instrumental, pathologizing students and removing their agency, rather than enacting the student-centred, empowering values that Learning Developers espouse.

3. Formulation allows Learning Developers to bring together the expertise of the practitioner with the experience of the student in a dialogue which promotes genuinely student-centred skills development guidance.

4. The 5 Ps of LD proposed here offer holistic points of access into an academic skills development issue, around which a dialogue can be framed, integrating student and practitioner perspectives on equal terms.

5. The 5 Ps of LD approach can be implemented in one-to-one, small group, workshop and online resource contexts, and is also of relevance to other roles involved in skills development, such as Personal Tutors, Peer Mentors, Disability Advisers, Counsellors or Librarians.

Keywords

Academic skills, Academic Literacies, Learning Development, Study skills, Formulation

The Problem in Practice

Learning Development is a field of practice in UK Higher Education "typically defined to include areas such as study skills, academic advice, lifelong learning and learning support" (Hilsdon, 2011, p. 1). It is a young profession, coalescing in the UK in the early 2000s around the LDHEN JISCmail list and the HEFCE funded LearnHigher CETL, and later represented by the Association of Learning Developers in Higher Education or ALDinHE (Hilsdon, 2011). Similar professional roles have arisen also in Australia (Association for Academic Language and Learning), New Zealand (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand) and Canada (Learning Specialists Association of Canada), all member organisations of the International Consortium for Academic Language and Learning Development. There is an older, analogous field of "Writing Centres" in the US, but as it is situated and constituted differently and arises from a different theoretical and policy basis, it has had less influence on practice in the ICALLD contexts. In the UK, Learning Development arose out of the expansion of the higher education sector and the widening participation agenda in the early 1990s, and continues to play a strategically important role in enhancing the student experience, retention, progression and closing attainment gaps through a focus on developing students' academic skills and literacies. It has evolved from a remedial focus on specific groups of students perceived as being non-traditional, lacking the expected preparedness and generic skills for university and therefore "needy", to an aspirational, non-deficit, partnership approach offering academic skills development for all students contextualized within their own discipline and circumstances.

Learning Developers are student-facing, but occupy a "Third Space" role (Whitchurch, 2013. See also McIntosh & Nutt, 2022 for a general overview of this term's use), liaising between students and the curriculum and institution (see Abegglen et al., 2019; Johnson, 2018; Webster, 2022 for the use of the term "Third Space" regarding Learning Development). Learning Developers are often (but not always) centrally located, typically offering one-to-one tutorials and workshops, and developing independent study resources as well as embedding provision within the curriculum to varying degrees, at the invitation of subject-teaching colleagues. Their role is designated by different terms, such as learning, academic or study skills development or support, and its remit is loosely defined, often with a focus on writing but also encompassing wider practices and literacies associated with learning (rather than just writing). Learning Development's remit could be summarized as comprising:

- Assessment and feedback literacy: Interpreting assignment questions, genres and assessment criteria, and using feedback
- Academic Literacies
    - The process of writing including planning, drafting and editing and managing the overall approach to writing
    - The written product (or other media) including identifying and developing discipline, level, and genre-appropriate academic style)
- Metacognition and learning to learn including reflection, critical thinking, revision and exam technique, time management, learning in lectures, seminars etc, reading and note-taking and independent learning.

It is adjacent to other skills-related professions such as librarians, researcher developers, English for Academic Purposes and student wellbeing. In practice, depending on where the service is located in an institution, there may be some overlap. Indeed, the approach proposed here may be of interest

and relevance to these other professions, as well as functions such as personal tutoring or peer mentoring.

Despite the contested and diverse language of Learning Development roles, and the variation in how they are constituted and positioned in different institutions, practitioners' common aim is to work alongside students to help them make sense of and negotiate the practices and discourses of higher education, reflecting on their own learning in this context to become successful independent learners (ALDinHE, 2022). Learning Developers in the UK and elsewhere have generally tended to share common values and principles that underpin and characterize their work. Rooted in academic literacies theory (Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, 2015), their conceptualisation of their remit tends more towards literacies as meaning-making practices than the more instrumental term "skills", although this word may often be used as a commonly understood shorthand. Learning Development values include a student-centred emphasis on how learners experience and make sense of academic practices and conventions, working in partnership with students, inclusive and emancipatory practice, and also approaches that are aspirational rather than based on a remedial or deficit model, embedded in socio-cultural, disciplinary context (Hilsdon, 2011; Johnson, 2018; Sinfield et al., 2011). This awareness of academic literacies as situated in contexts of identity, power and authority, cultural capital and hierarchy (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001) and resulting emancipatory ethos draws on critical pedagogy theorists such as Freire (1972) or Bourdieu (1994) and stresses social justice (Sinfield et al., 2011). One-to-one work has historically been a core aspect of Learning Development practice, and these common values have therefore been influenced by other "helping" professions such as counselling (Barlow et al., 2011; Delderfield & McHattie, 2018; Murray & Glass, 2011, p. 30; Peelo, 1994) to include non-judgemental, person-centred values. These commonalities have recently resulted in the development of a formal, codified statement of ALDinHE's values as a professional community (ALDinHE, 2022; Briggs, 2018). Inasmuch as Learning Developers are teachers, the person-centred, emancipatory values they espouse place them therefore firmly at the more Rogerian, progressive end of the teaching spectrum (Hilsdon, 2018, p. 104; Rogers, 1951, pp. 384–428).

While many Learning Developers may originally have a background in other professions such as subject teaching, English for Academic Purposes, Specific Learning Difficulties, Educational or Researcher Development, Librarianship or Counselling, Learning Development is distinct from these roles and as such offers a unique contribution to the student experience and the Higher Education sector. However, Learning Development suffers not just from marginal status in institutions, but a lack of understanding, definition and clarity about the role, even within the profession. Despite the clear need to adopt new approaches and practices on becoming a Learning Developer, there is little formal training for practitioners to adjust to their new roles (Caldwell et al., 2018, p.125; Evans et al., 2019, pp. 9–10; Webster, 2017) and indeed little clarity on what these new distinct practices and approaches might be (Evans et al., 2019, p. 2; Morrison & Navarro, 2012). A values-driven approach to defining and shaping Learning Development's distinct practices is the obvious place to start developing practices to help them enact this distinct way of working: creating a neutral space in which they can centre the student and work with them to interrogate and negotiate the conventions of their disciplinary and institutional contexts.

However, Learning Developers work in the context of Higher Education, a community of practice (both institutional and disciplinary) which has its own norms, values and standards and is strongly hierarchical, with issues of power and authority (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159, 2006) and "gate-keeping" (Lillis, 2001, p. 20) surrounding teaching and assessment. Given their values, Learning Developers often find themselves in tension with or challenging this culture, and aim to champion more emancipatory, participatory, collaborative ways of helping students engage with the

curriculum. Given the low status of the profession (Barkas, 2011a, 2011b; Blythman & Orr, 2006; Evans et al., 2019; Murray & Glass, 2011; Webster, 2022), it is often difficult to push back against pressure from institutional management to conform to a more instrumental, generic and deficit approach to study skills and preserve a values-driven practice not just as individual practitioners but also at the level of the institution's Learning Development service and indeed the whole profession. However, there is also still much work to do to interrogate the profession's own frame of reference and critically reflect on practice to question what is meant in practical terms by these espoused theories and whether they do indeed inform practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Research into student writing has long recognized "a need to move away from the practice of tutors and researchers claiming to know the reasons why students' texts are written as they are" (Lillis, 2001, p. 27), yet while Learning Developers may use this scholarship as a theoretical underpinning for their work, the insights from research have not as yet translated into a formal model for practice. Sinfield et al. (2011, p. 57) describe Learning Development work as "non-directive and collaborative in nature", but without a framework for enacting this, there is a risk that practice may fall short of this ideal. Indeed, Barlow et al. (2011, p. 49) warn that "without the breadth of a perspective afforded by a reflective and philosophical framework, learning developers, and learning development provision, may adopt a purely instrumental role", far from their emancipatory ethos of working alongside students as equal partners in the process.

Many Learning Developers come from a professional teaching background, and all work in an educational setting in which the student and the Learning Developer are implicitly placed in an unequal relationship of expert and novice, at odds with the values professed. The "giving advice and guidance" language that is often used of Learning Development provision reinforces the remedial view of their work as the active, expert partner giving learning to the passive, deficient student. Caldwell et al.'s (2018, p. 129) commentary on transcripts from one-to-one tutorials reveals the damage that can be done to student autonomy, independent learning and indeed self-esteem if provision is not genuinely student-centred, equal and collaborative but positioned, however subtly phrased, as giving expert advice to remedy a deficit: "The tutorial is therefore guided by the LD and the student adheres by providing continuers, agreements and minimal responses. Challenge is rare, yet accounts are often provided after LD evaluation to defend, save face or explain". The student's engagement has been reduced to passive agreement or defensive self-justification, contributing little to the process of their own development. As Peelo (1994, p. 23) states, "diagnostically wrapping up a student's study crisis in your own answers is a highly effective way of closing down communication".

Regressing to a prescriptive, instrumental, deficit approach to developing students' academic skills would leave Learning Development and indeed institutions less fit for purpose in the contemporary Higher Education context. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when an abrupt shift to online learning tested not only staff's teaching approaches but also students' learning practices, Learning Development's foundation in a person-centred, more holistic perspective was well placed to help students cope successfully in the face of uncertainty, anxiety and overwhelm. No one was prepared for this, and an approach which listened to and worked with students to co-create student-centred, adaptive guidance rather than deliver prescriptive, remedial advice was essential. Similarly, the roots of Learning Development in emancipatory practice and social justice meant that it was far better suited than a traditional deficit model of skills delivery to help Higher Education take account of the discussions arising from the Black Lives Matter movement and calls to Decolonize the Curriculum. A student-centred, dialogic approach rather than an instrumental delivery approach is the key to academic skills development in the 21st Century. To continue to shape academic skills development and its place in inclusion and student success, it is vital that Learning Development as a profession formalizes its values-driven approach into established concrete models for practice. If unexamined,

and in the absence of any formal models for Learning Development work, practice may fall into the following implicit model:

- Identify the student's problem (at the level of the individual or cohort)
- Explain to them what has gone wrong
- Recommend ways for them to fix it.

Despite the profession's championing of a non-remedial, student-centred, partnership approach, this is uncomfortably close to a medical model of pronouncing a diagnosis on examination of the symptoms and prescribing a treatment. This not only pathologizes the student by locating the problem in them, but also robs them of agency as they passively await the Learning Developer's prescription, ownership of that outcome and the opportunity to contribute their expertise to the process. Yet students do have expertise: "as no one else can know how we perceive, we are the best experts on ourselves" (often attributed to Carl Rogers. See Gross, 2010, p. 674). Assessment can only indirectly view the learning which resides in the student's head, accessible only through flawed, opaque, contested media such as writing. From a phenomenological perspective then, it is the student who is the real expert on their own learning, yet the above model-in-practice does not acknowledge or draw on this in better understanding the student's development needs, informing the process or determining the ultimate outcome, despite Learning Development's espoused student-centred ethos. The context of education may place Learning Developers and students in unequal roles, and the expertise that students bring may be different in kind to that of the Learning Developer. However, students' expertise in their own learning and circumstances should not be regarded as of lesser value or validity than that of the Learning Developer but as equal and complementary, and just as necessary.

Formulation: a Solution?

There has been a movement in the medical professions to depart from the paternalistic, "doctor knows best" approach towards a more collaborative model with the patient. It is worth considering how this has been achieved, and what approaches Learning Developers might adapt to ensure that their work reflects their values. Clinical Psychology also deals with issues and constructs that are not easy or even possible to categorically and objectively observe, and one-to-one and small group work forms a core aspect of its practice. As a mental health profession, its values are close to the Rogerian, student-centred origins of Learning Development (Hilsdon, 2018, pp. 93–96; 108; Peelo, 1994, p. 8). It recognizes that "the single most damaging effect of psychiatric diagnosis is loss of meaning" as people's problems are divested of their personal and social situatedness and labelled as "illness" (Johnstone, 2018, p. 2). This statement echoes students' disenfranchisement from their own meaning-making and identity construction in academic writing, which privileges the discourse perspective of the marker in determining what is and is not permitted (Lillis, 2001, p. 78ff). Clinical Psychology is, like Learning Development, a relatively young profession (Llewelyn & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2017, p. 8), which has established itself and claimed professional status not just through expert knowledge, but through distinct skilled practices. One of the most central of these clinical skills is formulation, now established by the British Psychological Society (Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), 2011) as a core professional competency. Indeed, it has been argued that formulation "played a crucial political role in establishing the expert status and independence of the fledgling profession" from psychiatry (Crellin, 1998).

Formulation is a way of relating theory to practice, but, given that "human beings and human distress [are] not well served by rational, technical application of research" (Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), 2011, p. 7), formulation synthesizes clinical theory with the patient's experience in a genuinely collaborative process. Formulation draws on two sources of evidence which are accorded equal importance: "the clinician brings knowledge derived from theory, research, and clinical experience, while the service user brings expertise about their own life and the meaning and impact of their relationships and circumstances" (Johnstone, 2018, p. 3). Formulation then is "the process of co-constructing a hypothesis or "best guess" about the origins of a person's difficulties in the context of their relationships, social circumstances, life events, and the sense that they have made of them" . It is a "process of ongoing collaborative sense-making" (Harper & Moss, 2003, p. 8), a shared story or narrative (Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), 2011, p. 7) that is "constructed, rather than discovered" (Harper & Spellman, 2014. See also Corrie & Lane, 2018, p. 24), a "plausible account" (Butler, 1998, p. 1), not an expert pronouncement. It is this account's personal meaning to the patient which is the integrating element, binding theory and practice as if in a "crucible" (Dudley & Kuyken, 2014, pp. 18–19) and determining whether or not it is true or helpful, rather than empirically "valid".

There is no single definition or method of formulation, as different professional groups within the mental health professions and the various schools of therapy and treatment may understand and implement it differently. This flexibility is an advantage, as its core principles are open enough to adapt for Learning Development. Common to all definitions is the recognition that from the patient's perspective, "at some level, it all makes sense" (Butler, 1998, p. 2), that an individual's beliefs and behaviour are entirely rational and explicable in the light of their personal experiences and perceptions. From the equal and integrated understandings of both clinician and client emerges a shared, co-constructed hypothesis about the client's problems, how they relate to one other, were developed and are maintained, and what personalized treatment options are likely to alleviate them. This process occurs within "a critical awareness of the wider societal context within which formulating takes place, including social injustice and power relationships" (Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), 2011, p. 20).

With its emphasis on working together to integrate the client's experience on an equal basis with the clinician's expertise, and a focus on making meaning within a social context which echoes that in Academic Literacies scholarship, the practice of formulation in Clinical Psychology presents an attractive approach well suited to the student-centred, emancipatory, partnership ethos of the Learning Developer. There are, of course, differences between the two professions which would necessitate some adaptations in the practice of formulation in Learning Development. Clinical Psychology is one of the health professions, and as such, is concerned with alleviating distress and treating problematic feelings and behaviours, focussing on mental illness and bringing the patient to mental health and wellbeing through therapy. Learning development, by contrast, does not necessarily position the kinds of issues which students bring to Learning Developers as a "problem" or 'disorder" to be treated, rejecting the remedial, deficit model for an Academic Literacies approach. Learning is inherently challenging and unsettling, even distressingly so at times, but this in itself is not necessarily conceptualized as a "problem" to be solved, but as a natural aspect of the process. Clinical Psychology aims for achievement and maintenance of wellbeing; Learning Development for exponential and ongoing learning. And learning, while it may be experienced as therapeutic for an individual learner, is not in itself therapy.

Formulation moreover plays a specific role in Clinical Psychology; it is "the bridge between [clinical] assessment and treatment" (Restifo, 2010, p. 210). The term is often used as a concrete, rather than abstract noun, meaning the "event" or "product" (often a document) which articulates the findings of the formulation process. While a psychological formulation may on occasion conclude that no intervention is required and that "the identified client is not the location of the "problem"" (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014, p. 9), and it is conceded that "developing a formulation can be a powerful intervention in itself, and may be enough on its own to enable the service user [...] to move forward and make changes" (Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), 2011, p. 9), in therapy, the formulation is primarily intended as a summary to inform the subsequent intervention. In Learning Development, however, formulation would play a far larger and less discrete role, the formulation in itself constituting a learning intervention through the developmental dialogue between Learning Developer and student in a one-to-one tutorial or other teaching session. Indeed, Johnstone and Dallos (2014, p. 4) stress that formulation can and should also be understood as a process and that even within Clinical Psychology, formulation should be recursive and dynamic, constantly open to reformulation rather than a fixed, concretized summation (see Crellin, 1998, p. 18). Moreover, Learning Developers' work is often one-off or very short term, with single booked appointments, workshops or drop-ins as requested by the student, rather than an extended therapeutic relationship, meaning that the multi-stage processes in Clinical Psychology and other therapies are either not possible or are much compressed.

Formulation is a professional skill, not a purely theoretical approach. In Clinical Psychology and related professions such as counselling, its practice depends very much on the school of treatment; there is no single way to formulate. One of the main ways is the Five Ps model in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Dudley & Kuyken, 2014; Llewelyn & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2017, pp. 52–53; MacNeil et al., 2012, pp. 2–3). In CBT, the Five Ps formulation enables the clinician and patient to integrate etiological, longitudinal and cross-sectional factors through looking together at the Presenting Problem, with Predisposing, Precipitating, Perpetuating and Protective Factors. In other words, this model enables the therapist and client to work through what the issue is, together with factors which have made the client vulnerable to it, have triggered their distress and kept it going, but also the things which help them cope. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy examines how the ways in which people view the world shapes their emotions and behaviours (Beck, 2020; British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies BABCP, 2021); this seems a good fit in the context of education in which concepts, perceptions and feelings shape study success.

The Five Ps of Learning Development

The Five Ps of LD proposed here are necessarily different to those used in Clinical Psychology and related professions. Nonetheless, they too are holistic points of access into a learning issue, encompassing understanding, feelings and behaviours, in a way which allows the student's experience and the expertise of the Learning Developer to be integrated in a collaborative process to better understand together what is going on and inform future development needs. They are not a diagnostic list of information to be elicited, appropriated and interpreted by the Learning Developer, but factors to be explored mutually in a consensual and collaborative way, integrated through their meaning to the student and juxtaposed with other meanings current in Higher Education so that a resolution can be negotiated in the interstices between them. For each of the Five Ps, there are therefore potentially multiple perspectives to explore: those of the student, the lecturer as representative of the discipline, the institution, the Learning Developer and of course any other relevant parties such as peers, family or previous teachers. Helping the student to juxtapose and negotiate between these often incongruent perspectives, exploring that space that opens up between

them, is key to formulation in Learning Development. The Five Ps are also potential starting points for development; any one of the Five Ps might contain the key to addressing the issue and moving forward.

The Five Ps arose out of the context of one-to-one appointments, but can also be used in more formally structured group workshops, informing a lesson plan, forming the basis of a reflective activity or group discussion, or woven as reflective prompts into online self-access materials. They need not necessarily be addressed sequentially, but iteratively and as they arise during the course of a one-to-one or other teaching session, to varying degrees of depth as seems appropriate. They need not form a preliminary phase of a one-to-one discussion or other teaching intervention but can be woven in and out between other activities such as explaining, offering guidance or coaching, revisited and revised throughout. The length of Learning Development one-to-one appointments and workshops varies between institutions, but the Five Ps model would in any case also vary greatly in terms of how long it might take to use; some issues might require nearly an hour, exploring each facet in depth, while others might find one or two of the Ps more relevant than the others or just need a very light-touch approach to ensure that both parties have jointly considered the factors they need to take into account. The collaborative relationship between student and Learning Developer may also vary, from an equally shared collaboration in a one-to-one tutorial, to a process in a workshop or online resource whereby the Learning Developer plays a more remote role as collaborator, helping the student to shape their exploration of their own development needs but not directly participating in a dialogue. Formulation in these latter circumstances frees the Learning Developer from a directive "content delivery" model of teaching to one which gives the student far more ownership of their development.

Presenting Problem

Students often self-refer themselves to a Learning Development session as they perceive that there is a "problem" with their learning, whether this be a desire to improve their marks or resubmit a failed assignment, or whether in their view they feel unsure if they are approaching an assignment task appropriately or study strategy efficiently. Where Learning Development workshops are embedded in the curriculum and mandatory, it is often the academic who perceives that there is or may be a problem with the cohort's study skills that needs addressing. The term "presenting problem" derives from health and social work professions, and recognizes that the issue as it is first articulated by the client (whether that stakeholder be the student or academic in this instance) should not be precipitously accepted on face value, but requires further exploration. Underlying the Presenting Problem is of course a developmental need, a less remedial, non-judgemental way of framing it, but perhaps not immediately identifiable or accessible. The purpose of this P therefore is to establish a mutual understanding of the underlying need beginning with the way it first presents, not just to clarify accurately what it is, but also to ask whose problem it is, why it is seen as a problem and how much of a problem it poses. This P is often where the discussion starts, but the dialogue may circle back to and refine it as it progresses; it may often turn out to be a completely different issue after discussion and reflection. As the Learning Developer is acting in an intermediary capacity, the insight that arises out of this joint exploration can be fed back into curriculum development or assessment design and inform the subject lecturer's own teaching practice.

It is important to explore the Presenting Problem's meaning to the student for a number of reasons. If the student is expressing the problem in their own terms, it is essential to establish what this means for them, to check that the Learning Developer is not talking at cross-purposes or making assumptions. The ways in which students articulate an issue may not always map onto the technical

language universities use in teaching and assessment, or may potentially hold a number of meanings which need to be pinned down more precisely. The student may themselves be uncertain exactly what is going on or how to express it, or may feel embarrassed or anxious about judgement. This can mean that they initially present an issue in ways that mask it or do not reflect it accurately, or even delay presenting it til the end of a session (the so-called "Doorknob Syndrome"). Practitioners also need to establish how much of a problem it is to the student. It may seem minor to the Learning Developer, but mean a lot to the student, or it may be a serious issue to the university (such as academic misconduct) which the student does not ascribe such urgency to; it may be localized to one assignment, or a recurring concern.

The language in which the student couches the Presenting Problem may however not be authentically their own, but reflect that of their lecturer, echoing instruction or feedback they have received. The meaning which the student ascribes to this language may not be the same as the lecturer's and indeed may not reflect an accurate understanding of the issue on the lecturer's part: "referrals often tell us as much about staff members' views of what study is about as they do about the student concerned" (Peelo, 1994, p. 6). However, even if not raised as the Presenting Problem, lecturer feedback can offer a useful additional perspective on it, and is worth asking about, from the student in a one-to-one, or from the lecturer when booking an embedded workshop. This also raises the question of whose problem it is, and what makes them frame it as a problem. It is possible that the student thought they were doing well, until their feedback and marks presented an alternative perspective, or that the student themselves feels an unease about their learning, despite good marks and feedback. Finding a way for the student to own the problem on their own terms is especially important if they have been unwillingly referred or had to attend a mandatory embedded workshop.

Pertinent Factors

These are any holistic, contextual issues, major or minor, short-term or long-lived, core or incidental, current or historical, systemic or individual, that impact on an individual student's learning. Although it may not fall within the Learning Developer's remit to resolve them, they need to be taken into account when exploring how an issue has arisen and how to move forward, so that the Learning Developer's input can be tailored and personalized, and the student themselves can draw on this context to comment on and inform the Learning Developer's suggestions. An exploration of the Pertinent Factors may have explanatory or predictive value, but might be very light touch as well as in depth. As ever, it is vital not to assume their meaning or relevance, but to ask the learner what these factors mean to them. This is particularly helpful in gaining an intersectional understanding (Crenshaw, 1989) of their impact on an individual student.

They may be factors which the student volunteers explicitly, they might emerge during the discussion as the student explores or reappraises their relevance and significance, or they may simply be held unspoken in the student's own mind as they consider any guidance given. They may be something the Learning Developer observes, while being careful not to draw conclusions without the student's input. They might even be conclusions drawn or diagnoses made by other parties such as family, friends or health and other support professionals. Pertinent Factors might include broader, systemic issues that impact on access and participation in education such as a disability, Specific Learning Difficulty or English as a second language, or a background or identity recognized as being underrepresented or disadvantaged in HE. They may be more specific individual issues like the fact they are having a difficult time at home, have been ill this term or are tired today, or how their particular schooling history and experience has shaped their learning beliefs and practices. They may even be things the learner themselves is not explicitly aware of or able to articulate, such as

constructed self-identities or narratives about themselves which the Learning Developer could help to challenge or reframe, such as "everyone is cleverer than me", "I don't belong here" or "I can't learn and develop". This P therefore encompasses also the wider socio-cultural factors (identities, discourses, meanings) which an Academic Literacies approach invites practitioners to acknowledge, and between which the student will need to navigate and negotiate. In all of this, the affective domain and constructions of identity are strongly represented, as well as the concrete social and material circumstances and histories of students' lives. This positions the Learning Developer as part of the pastoral network of support around a student, working with Personal Tutors, Student Wellbeing and peer mentoring, and able to contribute a meaningful integrative perspective to that provision, drawing on their experience of what students tell them in this "third space" and their ability to interpret it in the light of Academic Literacies theory.

Perception of Task

Lillis (2001, pp. 22–24; see also Lillis & Turner, 2001) problematizes the implicit assumption that the language of the institution is naturally self-explanatory, transparent and unambiguous, whereas that of students is problematic and opaque. This P then prompts practitioners to seriously explore the student's perception of what they have been asked to do, from their perspective. A student's response to a learning activity or assignment might seem bemusing if it does not conform to the institution's norms and expectations, but students are intelligent; from their perspective, taking into account the Pertinent Factors, their response will have an internally consistent rationale as, to cite Butler (1998, p. 2) again, "on some level, it all makes sense". It is both fair to the student and sensible in terms of the developmental dialogue to make this the starting point, rather than what they *should* have done. Their reading of the task might reveal an underlying misconception, some genuine ambiguities, tensions or inconsistencies, or it might display a perfectly valid alternative interpretation, given the circumstances and information available to the student. The Learning Developer might then juxtapose this with their own expertise on what the lecturer or institution probably intended, or with the student's own experience of the resulting Process and Product, and help the student negotiate a resolution or develop their academic, information or assessment literacies. This P might encompass a student's reading of an assignment brief or essay question, or it might be their implicit expectations of an activity such as reading or note-taking in an HE context, or it could also be their assumptions around requirements such as "criticality", "originality" or "independence". Learning Developers thus have a unique insight into assessment literacy, on the disconnect between what academics mean (both formal articulations such as marking criteria or informal, often implicit expectations), and how their students (quite validly) perceive this, and can play a valuable role in bringing the two parties into a greater mutual understanding of assessment and appreciation of the complexity involved.

Process

Process refers to how the student went about their learning. Lecturers' focus is often on the end product, the assignment, as this is often the only part of learning that they see in assessment. However, as language is not a wholly transparent medium, the end product can only indirectly give access into a student's learning and may be quite misleading about the process by which it was created. Students may highlight a mismatch between the feedback they received: "this report is poorly structured – you need to spend time planning your writing!" and their experience (they *did* plan the assignment, extensively). Issues which were seemingly located in the written product may actually be the result of how they approached a task such as reading. For example, consistently going over the word count might be due to lack of a concise writing style, or it might be that they

interpreted the remit of the task too broadly, or were not reading selectively. It is important to explore not only what the student did, but also their rationale for choosing this approach and reflections on how well they felt it was working for them. Students may for example have imbibed messages about there being a "right" or orthodox way to approach learning, whether this is implicit or due to overly dogmatic advice, or they may be attached to a method which was successful at a previous stage of learning but inappropriate in the new context. Exploring their Process and how it shaped the end product with the student will help both parties to understand where the issue is located and how the student may need to adjust or develop their strategies. Learning Developers are in a privileged position as they can offer a non-judgemental space in which the process of learning "behind the scenes" can be made visible and explored in a way that assessment rarely does, by valuing the student's expertise: what they did, why, and how they felt about it. This perspective can be fed back into the curriculum, designing activities to scaffold the development of skills through a focus on the process of an assignment, enhancing feedback so it does not rest on invalid assumptions based on the final product, and encouraging a broader, less dogmatic range of study strategies which encompasses a multiplicity of valid individual approaches.

Product

The Product is a fixed, concrete point in space and time (an artefact or event) where the learning literally becomes an "outcome". The heavy emphasis in Higher Education on assessment, the (often written) end product, often leads students as well as lecturers to locate the issue here as this is where it becomes visible (Lillis, 2001, p. 22) hence the predominance of looking at written work in Learning Development practice (Hilsdon, 2018, p. 24). The Product can therefore become conflated with the Presenting Problem, leading to a focus on fixing surface features. It should not necessarily dominate discussion of the Five Ps though, and it may be useful to delay looking at or directly discussing an actual assignment or other artefact until the other Ps have at least been touched on. This helps to keep the focus on learning and broader points of development, rather than resolving surface technical issues with an isolated assignment.

While looking at an assignment can be a useful diagnostic tool or way to test a hypothesis, it is important to note that even this P does not just involve the Learning Developer looking at an assignment and drawing conclusions about it or recommendations from it. This can all too easily become "editing with commentary", which may be useful but is not necessarily Learning Development. Moreover, the student's expertise here is essential. If the Learning Developer is working outside the discipline of their own original graduate study, which is the norm if they are centrally located in an institution, then it is very likely that the student themselves has, in the course of their studies and reading, seen more of the typical "products" of their discipline than the Learning Developer has. For a Learning Developer to familiarize themselves with the nuances of the discourse, genres and conventions of every discipline as they are practised at each stage of study and beyond would be an impossibility; a formulation approach however would enable the Learning Developer to help elicit the student's own intuitive observations of their discipline and its practices, so that together they can identify its features and discuss how the student might apply them. This is a fruitful approach not only in a one-to-one appointment looking at the student's own writing and reading, but also looking at exemplars in a group workshop, and develops the student's ability to consciously analyse their discipline discourse conventions for themselves.

An Academic Literacies approach highlights the fact that no written product can unproblematically and transparently speak for itself but is subject to contested interpretation and meaning making (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). The focus of this P is therefore as much the student's response to their own Product or those typical of their discipline, as the Learning Developer's response. Indeed, the student's novice perspective here is invaluable given that academic staff are experts in their discipline's practices and conventions to the extent that, having developed "unconscious competence" (the origins of this term are contested), they are often too close to their practice to articulate it. Learning Developers are often the intermediary between the two, helping to surface and negotiate each party's meanings and interpretations. Given that showing someone your work in an educational context can feel exposing, it is respectful to the student as well as informative to invite them to gloss it with their own commentary on its meaning to them: how they feel about it, what state it is in (rough draft or polished edit?), what they wanted to say or achieve, and how they feel the product reflects this, where they feel any tensions are. This P may entail asking the student to indicate where and how they feel "criticality", "structure" or "analysis" are inscribed, and what signals this to the reader, before the Learning Developer offers any observation. The Learning Developer's comment does not involve critiquing the text or other Product, but modelling and interrogating the typical academic reader's response, alongside the student's commentary, and finding ways together to resolve any disparity between the two. It involves helping to interpret feedback from other readers (such as markers), drawing out implicit conventions together and discussing how the student wishes to respond – what they want to say, and what they can say in this context (Lillis, 2001, p. 51).

Of course, not all issues brought to a Learning Developer revolve directly around a written text. In this wider sense, the Product is the artefact or event which is the outcome of their approach to learning. The text might not yet be written, in which case the Product becomes the plan or "ideal" text which the student envisages writing, and what they hope such a text will demonstrate. A Product might also mean an artefact produced or encountered during learning: a book or journal article they are reading, marking criteria, a search strategy, a set of lecture notes, a time planner or revision aids. It might also be a verbal account of their experience of sitting an exam or being in a seminar. In these cases, the practitioner and student are still exploring how an artefact such as a set of notes, or an event such as an account of a seminar experience, reflects the student's aims and intentions as well as the expectations of the discipline community, in the light of the other Ps.

Using the Five Ps of LD in Practice

Use of the Five Ps of LD could very easily slip into diagnostic mode, if they are used as a checklist of information for the Learning Developer to elicit and analyse. Equally, it is not straightforwardly a formula for content delivery or lesson planning. The Five Ps of LD are a framework to help the Learning Developer collaborate with the student, not to pronounce on them; formulation is something done *with*, not *to*, the student. In addition to using the Five Ps, the following points for practice offer guidance to ensure that they are used in the spirit of formulation rather than diagnosis:

- In the spirit of consensual practice, formulation should be used quite explicitly with the student. Clear contracting with the student is important, not just to agree logistics of the session but to explain the Learning Developer's role and approach and what it is hoped may be gained from it, as well as acknowledging the student's role as (in their own way) equal expert and co-creator of meaning.
- Questions therefore need to be posed in open terms that make it clear that the Learning Developer is not testing the student or expecting a particular answer, nor are they going to

read something into the student's responses from a privileged expert position which the student is not comfortable with or party to. Indeed, the practitioner might ask the student what their views are on the merit of different avenues of exploration.

- The Learning Developer's interpretations and comments should likewise be posed in genuinely tentative, non-directive language as provisional hypotheses or suggestions for consideration. They are offered in ways which invite the student to comment on them, supplement them or even reject them with genuine freedom rather than deferring to the practitioner or allowing them to impose their meaning on the student's learning. Better still, the Learning Developer might use coaching techniques to help the student generate their own hypotheses, questions or new angles to explore.

- When negotiating between two discordant perspectives, it is worth keeping in mind that it may not always be the student who has to adapt; emancipatory practice might entail helping them challenge oppressive or inadequate responses from the institution or even the Learning Developer themselves. Validation is therefore also a key aspect of formulation in Learning Development.

- Formulation is not intended to constitute the whole of a Learning Development session and may not be appropriate in all cases. It can be used alongside and interwoven with other typical activities and roles, such as contracting, advising, coaching or teaching. This entails switching between these roles, and would need to be handled transparently with the student to avoid confusion, for example as to whether the practitioner is speaking at that moment as a teacher or a coach.

The Five Ps framework, and indeed the concept of formulation more generally, might in some form be relevant also in other student-facing roles such as Specific Learning Difficulties support, EAP teaching, library information literacy provision, peer mentoring schemes or Personal Tutoring. However, the full formulation approach is dependent on the distinct values of Learning Development, particularly its emancipatory and non-judgemental ethos of collaboration, working alongside students as equal partners. The inherently judgemental and hierarchical nature of the lecturer's role as subject expert and assessor would compromise the greater equality inherent in learning development formulation, just as an emancipatory approach would be problematic where a profession has "ownership" over the systems it teaches (for example, librarians and information systems) or learning outcomes which are not as subjective or contestable (such as EAP tutors and the English Language component of their role). Learning Developers are positioned more as intermediaries between the student and the curriculum than owners of it; their learning outcomes, if they can be said to have them, emerge from the individual student's engagement with their own learning and the discipline or institution, and are co-owned between the Learning Developer, the student and the lecturer. Formulation in its fullest sense therefore is a characteristically Learning Development approach to teaching academic skills. There is rich potential for collaboration between Learning Developers, academics and other student-facing roles, as well as feeding into higher level policy and strategy development, as Learning Developers bring a wealth of experience and expertise arising directly out of this partnership with students in this "third space".

If a diagnostic approach "turns "people with problems" into "patients with illnesses."", sealing them off behind a label (Johnstone, 2018, p. 2), then HE teaching and assessment can often turn "students who are learning" into "work that is lacking", sealed off behind a grade and marking criteria. Formulation may help Learning Developers and other education professionals who support students to bring the meaning back into learning and their own skills development, just as clinical psychologists use it to "restore the meaning in madness" as a normal response to abnormal circumstances (Johnstone, 2018, p. 2). Students are the best experts in their own learning, and their

responses to HE teaching and assessment, however unexpected or unconventional, are perfectly valid, reasonable and understandable, in the light of their own personal and socio-cultural context. Formulation allows Learning Developers to acknowledge and draw on the student's expertise, integrating it into Learning Development in a genuinely emancipatory, student-centred and collaborative process to help learners understand and negotiate a way forward between competing perspectives to develop their skills. It is also indirectly a powerful source of professional development for the Learning Developer, as it enables them to learn a great deal from students by listening to them on their own terms, which in turn enriches their practice. This privileged insight enhances their operational and strategic value in the teaching, learning and assessment landscape of their institutions. The Five Ps model of formulation constitutes a skilled professional practice which is distinctively and definitively Learning Development, rooted in its particular values and distinguishing it from the skills development contributions of other student-facing professions in Higher Education, as a valuable field of practice in its own right.

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