



## **LD superpowers: an appreciative inquiry (Ai) into the skills and contribution of LDers from minoritised groups**

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### ***Presentation abstract***

This research looks at how personal identity and lived experience of learning developers (LDers) from minoritised groups contribute to professional practice within learning development. Using the knowledge building capacity of appreciative inquiry (Ai) this research has used participatory workshops and creative analytical methods that explore these 'superpowers'. Fully embracing the Ai paradigm this research has been designed with Varona's (2024) 5 ways to view Ai to create the environment for 'radical curiosity' (Godwin, Cooperrider, 2024).

Uncertainty about identity and roles within LD is indicative of the tendency to marginalise the work of LDers and conflate it with other areas (Webster, 2024). This tendency, and this research's focus on minoritised LDers, suggest this is an area where minoritised staff work with minoritised students in a minoritised area of HE. These layers of disadvantages are why the research is designed to uncover knowledge, expertise and understanding that may otherwise be obscured.

This presentation presented the preliminary results of the study which forms part of my PhD in Education and Social Justice at Lancaster University. The study consisted of two workshops run at Lancaster University and London Metropolitan University using creative techniques to answer 4 questions aligned to the aspects of Ai:

- How do LDers from minoritised groups view their own skills and contributions?
- How do the skills, backgrounds and lived experience of LDers from minoritised groups enhance learning develop in the traditional higher education environment?

- How would LDers from minoritised groups like these skills and contributions used and/or recognised in higher education in the future? And what recommendations would they make to achieve this?

As well as participation in the workshops, participants were also invited to take part in the analysis of the transcripts from the workshops using black-out poetry.

**Keywords:** personal identity; appreciative inquiry; learning development; minoritised staff; creative methods.

### ***Community response***

The session explored the use of creative and participatory research methods to examine how learning developers from minoritised groups view their contribution to HE.

Appreciative inquiry, as a research method, is a strength based approach which rejects deficit, focusing instead on the positive things people can do. The presenter shared reflections from their research journey thus far. Preliminary findings reveal the need for more egalitarian approaches, horizontal structures and a more holistic view of teaching in HE.

Attendees responded enthusiastically to this presentation with one delegate commenting on how they appreciated (and adored) the thoughtful journey Jen presented of her research methodology. I work in a Widening Participation and Social Mobility team, alongside the awareness of the 'survey fatigue' we cultivate in students. Our intentions are good: use validated scales, such as those provided by TASO, to ensure consistency of evaluation across the sector. Nice in practice, but horrid for students, who may encounter not only repeated surveys in general, but the SAME survey again... and again. Plus, a survey will never showcase properly important nuances of experience, identity, and change. This enthusiastic response concluded with a call to include more ALDcon sessions to thoughtfully delineate creative methods for evaluation, and I thank Jen for sharing such promising ways to capture and analyse lived experience in a research context. Another delegate highlighted how enjoyable it was hearing about the innovative methodologies employed for this project, as well as appreciative inquiry. Not having had

encountered this type of Ai before, they thought it aligns particularly well with the rejection of a deficit-based approach in LD.

### **Next steps and additional questions**

Although the project centred on staff participants, would it be possible to apply these methods to student participants? Specifically, the timed/scaffolded 'making workshop' and the use of blackout poetry to reflect on transcripts.

The initial findings are exciting, particularly this idea of LD being 'the same' as the students they help. Do you have any further insight on this aspect? How does it affect the LD/learner relationship?

### ***Author's reflection***

It has been really encouraging to hear the community response to my methodology and would be excited to explore how this can be adapted and codified to provide a usable format for colleagues to take forward. I think both methods work well in scenarios where there may be power differences between participants and researcher, but also where there is an element of discovery, where participants may not have considered the answers to the questions posed before.

Appreciative inquiry also provides an opportunity to further reject a deficit approach and embody it in research as well as in interactions between students and staff.

The analysis of finding has continued since the presentation was delivered. In some ways this has strengthened the early insights and in other ways it has highlighted the variety and richness of different responses. Participants all demonstrate a very considered and well thought out vision for the future, hopefully in some part due to the activities undertaken in the research. This could be easily mobilised by middle and senior leaders alike to fuel student success into the future.

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The author did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

## **References**

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