



Quiet spaces, collective voices: creative pedagogies for reflection and renewal

Sandra Sinfield

London Metropolitan University, UK

Sandra Abegglen

University of Calgary, Canada

Debbie Holley

University of Bournemouth, UK

Presentation abstract

Educational institutions, and institutions more broadly, often overlook the value of our collective narratives and the stories of those who shaped them. This session offered an active yet meditative space for attendees to engage in and reflect on creative and liberatory practices that have been shared across our community, and in doing so to implicitly honour some of the individuals and collectives who have made contributions to education, society and our community, whether big or small.

The LD community has created a pedagogy of practice that can get lost in the 'chatter' and clutter of everyday working lives. We revisited some practices that have been surfaced, shared and celebrated by ALDinHE. Framed as five focused activities that LDs can draw upon for their own teaching practice, this workshop session aimed to provide a meaningful space for reflection and remembrance. By sharing techniques for noticing, poetry, drawing, collaborative writing, and concluding with a short, guided meditation, we offered a space for replenishment and hope.

Keywords: collective narratives; community; learning development; reflection, replenishment.

Community response

Participants in this session reacted positively to the ideas and activities presented.

Responses to the session showed that participants valued how the presenters were able to create an environment in which one was able to reflect purposefully and think positively about others' influence on their actions. Several participants highlighted how this 'safe space' was one in which they felt able to relax, restore and reinvigorate:

What a special space. You created such a wonderful environment for us all to reflect, engage and be curious. It really did feel like a supportive, and yes, a safe, space in which to let go a little and to feel free, and to explore.

It was a real pleasure to have an hour all for ourselves.

One participant felt initial apprehension over some of the activities but on engaging in those activities found them to be a positive experience:

I was apprehensive about some of the activities, but actually they were the ones I enjoyed the most – the found word poetry in particular was liberating and surprising, giving me a different perspective on what poetry can be.

Above all, there was the feeling that the content of this session was one of importance and one that should be shared:

I very much look forward not only to deploying some of the activities shared in this session with my students, but with co-workers who I think will be just as recharged by the practices.

[The session] made me think about the benefit of not only taking time for meaningful reflection, but also the joy of doing so with others.

Next steps and additional questions

Given the positivity around the workshop and its impact on individual delegates, the following could be considered:

- What would a team quiet space look like?
- Is there potential for a student quiet space?

Authors' reflection

This session served as both a reminder and a reclaiming – a space to pause, breathe and honour the often-forgotten stories, practices and people that shape our educational communities. Educational institutions too often fall into patterns of collective amnesia, prioritising efficiency over memory, progress over presence. In contrast, this session invited us into a more intentional and reflective pedagogy, one grounded in creativity, community and care.

Together, we engaged in liberatory practices rooted in the learning development (LD) community's evolving pedagogy of practice. Through exercises such as The Art of Noticing, Found Word Poetry, Mindful Drawing, Meditation, and Collective Writing, we revisited methods that offer grounding, reflection, and connection. These are more than just activities - they are acts of resistance against the pace and pressures of institutional life, allowing us to make space for being, remembering, and imagining otherwise.

The session was at once active and meditative, playful and profound. It reminded us that pedagogy is not just about delivering content; it's about nurturing relationships - with our students, with our colleagues, and with ourselves. Key takeaways for us are:

- Educational practices should honour memory, community, and care - not just productivity.
- Creative, reflective activities can be powerful tools for replenishment and connection in both staff and student learning spaces.
- The LD community holds a rich and valuable pedagogy that deserves recognition, preservation, and continued practice.
- Small acts - like mindful drawing or poetry - can be significant gestures of hope and humanity in higher education.

Let us not forget. Let us keep creating, noticing, and remembering - together.

The appendix contains author outputs and reflections on the themes raised in this paper.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Alice Stinetorf from the University of Southampton. The community response was edited by Laura Dyer from the University of Leeds, who captured the key themes of the community discussion.

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

Further reading

The art of noticing

Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.

Ridley, P. (n.d.) *Visual learning*. University of Brighton. Available at: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/visuallearning/> (Accessed: 11 September 2025).

Sinfield S., Burns, T. and Holley, D. (2004) 'Outsiders looking in or insiders looking out? Widening participation in a post-1992 university', pp.137-152, in J. Satterthwaite, E. Atkinson and W. Martin (eds) *The disciplining of education: new languages of power and resistance*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Walker, R. (2019) *The art of noticing: 131 ways to spark creativity, find inspiration, and discover joy in the everyday*. New York: Knopf Publishing.

Poetry

Illingworth, S. and Jack, K. (2024) *Poetry and pedagogy in higher education: a creative approach to teaching, learning and research*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Merrydew, A. (2022) 'Poetry and pedagogy: Using blackout poetry to build student academic literacies', #Take5 #72, 26 May. Available at: <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/take5->

[72-poetry-and-pedagogy-using-blackout-poetry-to-build-students-academic-reading-literacies/](#) (Accessed: 17 September 2025).

Drawing

Abegglen, S., Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2018) 'Drawing as a way of knowing: visual practices as the route to becoming academic', *Canadian Journal for Studies in Discourse and Writing/Rédactologie*, 28, pp.173-187. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31468/cjsdwr.600>

Ridley, P. (2010) 'Visualising learning', in P. Hartley, J. Hilsdon, S. Sinfield and C. Keenan (eds) *Learning development in higher education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Sinfield, S., Burns, T. and Abegglen, S. (2019) 'Becoming playful: the power of a ludic module', in A. James and C. Nerantzi (eds) *The power of play in higher education: creativity in tertiary learning*. London: Springer, pp.23-31. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-95780-7>

Collaborative writing

Abegglen, S., Buckley, C., Burns, T., Sinfield, S. and Syska, A. (2024) 'Writing to learn: creative LD perspectives for learning developers and students', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi32.1396>

Abegglen, S., Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2021) *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: a staff guide*. Calgary: University of Calgary. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.11575/PRISM/38898>

Ingle, J. (2021) 'Engaging with university writing and discourse', in H. Pokorny and Warren, D. (eds) *Enhancing teaching practice in higher education*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Mindful meditation

Frith, L. (2017) 'The best way to start the new academic year? It's meditation Jim...', #Take5 #23, 3 October. Available at: <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/take5-23-the-best-way-to-start-the-new-academic-year-its-meditation-jim/> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).

Holley, D. (2021) 'From emojis to emotional wellbeing: the contested role of the digital in scaling patient health and wellbeing support', *Slideshare*, 20 April. Available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/from-emojis-to-emotional-wellbeing-the-contested-role-of-the-digital-in-scaling-patient-health-and-wellbeing-support/247456395> (Accessed: 17 September 2025)

Author details

Sandra Sinfield is Associate Professor in Education and co-founder of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), where she serves on the Steering Group and co-chairs its Mentoring Group. She provides research-informed leadership in teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum development, supporting innovative professional practice. Through her work in the Centre for Teaching Enhancement, Sandra champions creative staff development, pedagogical research and publication, advancing inclusive and transformative approaches to higher education.

Sandra Abegglen is a Researcher in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at the University of Calgary, leading the TALON project on learning and teaching in design disciplines. She holds a PhD in Education, an MSc in Social Research and an MA in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and is an expert Senior Lecturer in Education Studies. Her research spans online education, creative pedagogy, mentoring, identity, visual narratives and qualitative methods, with extensive publications on emancipatory and playful learning.

Debbie Holley is Professor of Learning Innovation at Bournemouth University, National Teaching Fellow, and Principal Fellow of AdvanceHE. She specialises in learning design and blended learning to engage diverse students, drawing on creative practice to support writing and teaching. Active in the Learning Development community, she contributes to the #Take5 blog, the annual conference, and previously served on the ALDinHE Steering

Group. Her research in education, quality enhancement and technology-enhanced learning informs national education policy.

Licence

©2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).

Appendix

As our session participants said, when provoked to create poems with 'found' words:

Flowing smoothly through
Overlapping, interweaving, moving, drifting
memories....

Empty paper
Still pen
Bright computer
Dark lamp
Full glass
Quiet headphones
Yummy peppermints
Hot coffee
Ready backpack
- Academic mornings > travels of thought

Oh reckless bite
Contingent
Cruel memory
Frosty chair,
disregarding.
My friend:

This serious mind
(for Tom Burns)

Bingo! A giant pink balloon
A riot of mutterings and hopeful tweets
Escape the liquorice dark
Blooming sun
Filling the desert
With snacks, tasty like cake
Shuts down those thoughts of 'right'
Heart and **mind** emerge elsewhere
Into your **element**.

Wonderful.
Freedom.
Like breathing in the forest, restorative and full of future.
Parallel -
Running alongside me, with 'yes', giving permission.
Spoken or unspoken
Championing.

Kiss the glass, see the sea
Love health, culture, bees
A visual love
A vibrant rose
A soothing light
Rest

Submerged in seaweed green
All shapes and sizes
All laughs and vibes
She is fierce
A breath
Music and a moment in a time lapse.

The sticking point could be
a lotus gasping, a duvet of fog,
the body's frailty, a bean becoming
a plant becoming more beans.
The eye sticks, which is to say
the gut and mind stick, on and to
the cliché and intriguing alike—
something is created.
Like a lens onto a desert unlikely
as it is full, the body layers meaning

onto chaos and hands layer meaning
onto gardens and we are layering
purpose into little lives—take a
sweet, deep breath.

Working away but ready for later, trainers, make-up, sunscreen at the ready.

I have got my cat treats ready hoping for a visit and cuddles.

Life is a wild odyssey
No waiting, just walking
A marathon, as a whole
With time for smelling
The flowers, the creation of
Paths that return to shelter each time

**Amber
valley
riders
inspire
Natural
Hostile
Takeovers
Fields
Path
Lovely
Looking
Seeing
Amazing
Culture
Learning
Mineral**

**Spending time riding through those amber valleys helps me to be creative.
Seeing the natural paths through the fields inspires me to learn about where I
am and why I am here.**

(from words gathered from a used train ticket)

I journey outwards (for once)
A route marked by stations
Now, yes, but I could do this anytime, and I don't
Why?

Am I not permitted, or
Does being an adult mean forever asking: 'is this valid?'

This non-refundable time, the non-exchangeable toil
This anything but standard-class

The Found Word Poetry Task, on which these poems are based (in case you'd like to try the activity with your own students):

Look around your space, look at books, articles, objects - write down 15 -20 words. Using the words you collected - and only those words - please construct a short 'poem' about the joys of meditative or creative practices in Learning Development work OR evoke a memory of a colleague who has inspired you.

See also:

Illingworth, S. (2024) *Learned words: using poetry to reflect on practices in higher education*. ALDinHE, LD@3, 13 November. Available at:
<https://aldinhe.ac.uk/product/events/learned-words-using-poetry-to-reflect-on-practices-in-higher-education/> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).

And, last but not least, a shout out to all the amazing LDers and educators - past and present - that have shaped what we and our session participants do - and as mentioned in our Collective Writing moment:

Gotta be: *hello lovely people* - **Tom Burns** always started with a warm inclusive welcome...

My first **ALDCon** and then subsequent ones - to be among so many wonderful, inspiring people, helping me understand our practice, being able to listen, learn, talk and explore.

All of the creative pedagogues out there - helped me find my playful and creative voice within LD and for **Mark Hardwick** - not a learning developer but an incredible lecturer who we lost this year. The most amazing inspiring teacher who managed to hold space for every person he met with dignity and interest and taught me the power of a good story! I am remembering the beautiful **Julian Ingle** - who I used to work with - who moved on to QMUL - who ran wonderful writing retreats - and who has 'left the building' - and we are left mourning a rich life and a great LDer.

I am shouting out for **Pauline Ridley** - still with us - but I remember in particular one amazing train journey with her - where she changed my life and my practice. At the end of LearnHigher it was Pauline who urged us to make a Memory Quilt - where we all made a square reflecting on the area we had worked on: notemaking, reading, writing, group work ... Pauline sewed it together and we carried it to many an #ALDcon after that!! (And now it resides with me here at the seaside!)

And of course I have to shout for **John Hilsdon**! Tom and I met him at a DPR conference (Discourse Power Resistance) - literally smoking round the bikesheds (where his dog Fletch waited patiently) - and where he shared his wish to create a national 'something' for LDers everywhere...

I have to mention the amazing **ALDinHE community**, who not only introduced me to the idea that SoTL is a 'thing', but also showed me that it's okay - necessary even - to be fierce when it comes to defending student support. Their passion, generosity, and unapologetic commitment to LD in education have shaped how I teach, research, and show up in academic spaces.