



Cultivating cross-disciplinary collaborations to enhance student outcomes: a case-study from London Southbank University

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Presentation abstract

In a rapidly evolving higher education landscape, fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations is vital to preparing students for the complexities of contemporary professional, social, and political contexts. This presentation explored how Learning Developers at London Southbank University (LSBU), an institution committed to vocationally relevant and professionally recognised education (London Southbank University, 2025), led initiatives to embed discipline-specific Academic Practice(s) and English Language support into curricula.

Focusing on two diverse programmes, Level 4 (first year, undergraduate) BA Business Management and Level 6 (final year, undergraduate) BA Fashion Communication, Learning Developers collaborated with subject tutors to identify key areas where students faced challenges in engaging with academic content. In Business Management, interventions targeted critical reading and analysis skills needed to evaluate case-studies and construct evidence-based arguments. In Fashion Communication, teaching focused on fostering critical reflection to refine research questions, aims and objectives, and methodologies/methods for critical research proposals, while enhancing peer-to-peer feedback to align with academic standards. These collaborations resulted in co-designed materials, co-teaching, and workshops tailored to each programme's unique demands.

Preliminary results highlighted the transformative impact of this approach. Students in both programmes reported increased confidence in navigating discipline-specific academic language and applying it within their fields. Quantitative data show improvements in first-

time assignment submission rates, overall pass rates, and the quality of submitted work. Academic staff also noted enhanced student participation and deeper critical engagement with course materials.

This case study demonstrated how embedding academic practice(s) within vocationally focused programmes can address persistent barriers to student achievement. It offered a replicable model for institutions seeking to enhance outcomes by bridging disciplinary divides and equipping students to engage critically in diverse contexts.

Keywords: academic practices; learning development; EAP; student outcomes; cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Community response

This session received comments and reflections on common challenges and shared practices in embedding Learning Development and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) into subject teaching.

Sam Thomas (Arden University) noted that the presentation covered a wide range of issues that are common to many Learning Developers such as inconsistency in lecturers' knowledge of the Learning Development offer, questions around relevance for students, and the challenge of measuring impact. They observed that the project seemed to have had a particularly positive effect on student confidence and engagement, two key areas on which to build future learning. Sam was also interested in the delivery model of the embedded sessions, asking whether running them outside lecture time or online affected attendance, and whether there were any plans to address this going forward.

Robert Ping-Nan Chang (University of the Arts London) commented on the value of the collaborative approach demonstrated in the session, particularly between EAP/Learning Development tutors and subject tutors. He referenced the rapport established with the Major Project Portfolio tutors before this intervention took place and asked about Robert Toniolo Wood's role in that relationship: how he has developed it with the course team and whether he was also a subject lecturer or had disciplinary expertise. He also raised

questions about the practical side of embedding skills within lectures: what skills were focused on and how was each skill session tied into each lecture?

Beverley Hancock-Smith (De Montfort University) found strong resonance with her own institution's model of embedded Learning Development. She raised a key question around scalability: if all programmes realise the impact this level of contextualised, embedded intervention can have on student outcomes, could this be rolled out across the whole institution? At her institution, increased promotion has led to high uptake from academic staff, but not all programmes engage. However, she noted, more effective promotional activities could overwhelm limited Learning Development capacity.

Next steps and additional questions

This case study highlighted some key areas for development as the embedded model evolves. A core consideration going forward is delivery. Galata and Toniolo Wood noted that some sessions had to be delivered online or outside scheduled lecture times, which may have affected attendance. Looking at how delivery methods and timing influence engagement will be important, especially if the offer is to be expanded to other modules or levels.

Another next step is about documenting and planning the sessions more systematically. In this initiative, the structure of embedded sessions was developed in parallel with ongoing delivery. Going forward, the team intends to agree on a clearer framework with module leaders earlier in the process, allowing for better alignment with learning outcomes and consistency across sessions. Building in student feedback, including short surveys after sessions, will also help evaluate what is working and where there is room to improve. The collaboration between Learning Development/EAP and the subject team was central to this work. Questions remain regarding the roles and relationships that make this collaboration effective, especially in settings where that familiarity does not already exist. Exploring how trust is built and maintained across teams, and how to support new partnerships, will be key to further developing this model.

As the work continues, several questions remain open:

1. How can the delivery of embedded sessions be made more consistent and accessible?
2. What practical steps support early planning and alignment with module goals?
3. What would sustainable growth of embedded Learning Development look like across a whole institution?

Authors' reflections

The reflections of the authors are organised as responses to the above questions shared by the reviewers:

1. Consistency is necessary for the development and success of the embedded teaching model. To achieve this, buy-in is essential, first from course leaders and later from senior leaders. While personal connections are key, they are not enough to ensure the scaling-up and sustainability of the model. Equally important is the institution-wide dissemination of the role of a Learning Developer, including how they can support diverse programmes of study and their students, as well as the promotion of the Learning Developer's qualifications, expertise, and alignment with good learning and teaching practice. These steps can help secure more institution-wide allies who value the contributions of Learning Developers and can strengthen their presence in the classroom and beyond.
2. For the smooth running of the embedded model, early planning is essential. The first practical step is to build relationships with module and course leaders before agreeing on a delivery plan. This allows Learning Developers to work alongside course teams to identify student needs, ensure alignment with module learning outcomes, and respond to delivery demands in terms of timing and mode. The next step is to include Learning Developers in course documentation, such as module guides and briefs, by incorporating Learning Development sessions as part of the module plan. These steps not only validate the presence of Learning Developers as key members of academic teams but also help move away from deficit models of

‘skills-building’ or ‘support’ towards a holistic academic literacies and Learning Development approach.

3. In an ideal world, universities would understand and value Learning Development as a field and position Learning Developers as part of academic teams, thereby validating their role and advocating for academic parity. Universities would also allocate appropriate funding for the expansion of Learning Development teams, as the role is interdisciplinary and typically supports higher education strategic plans. In the current higher education landscape, though, with limited resources, embedded Learning Development could grow through a ‘train the trainer’ model, in which Learning Developers act as consultants. In this model, Learning Developers would move from teaching sessions to providing course teams with the appropriate resources to deliver themselves. Instead, they could focus on developing continuing professional development (CPD) sessions to disseminate good practice, leading to stronger student engagement and outcomes.

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

AI was used in the community response for grammar check. In line with our wider policy, other editorial processes did not use AI.

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Authors' details

Lenia Galata is an experienced educator and programme lead in English for Academic Purposes at LSBU, working in close collaboration with a range of disciplines, particularly the Business School, to support students in developing academic writing and enhancing language skills for employability. Her work focuses on embedding academic literacy and language development within degree programmes through integrated sessions, tailored workshops, and individual support, with a strong commitment to inclusive teaching and accessible learning. She also leads initiatives that strengthen students' professional communication, including support with CVs, cover letters, applications, and workplace interactions. She holds a PhD in Psycholinguistics and her experience spans teaching and leading in EAP and academic communication provisions in the UK and abroad. Before joining LSBU, Lenia worked in a range of HE contexts where she designed curricula, delivered academic writing and study skills support, and contributed to the development of innovative and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Robert Toniolo Wood is an experienced Academic Literacies practitioner working on the Foundation and Extended Master's Programmes at London Metropolitan University. He is also a Visiting Lecturer in Learning Development at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. He has previously taught at a number of UK HEIs: London South Bank University (LSBU), Goldsmiths, University of London, and the University of the Arts London (UAL). He works with students on a wide range of Academic Writing and Research Practice topics with a focus on creating dialogic spaces for learners to engage in creating, presenting, questioning, and developing new knowledge. He also enjoys working with students on reflective and reflexive practice as a means to understanding how the implications of their learnings can impact the broader context in which they work. His personal interests lie in the fields of academic writing and research

practice for Art(s) and Design alongside exploring the notion of 'Third Space' and its impact on his practice and those that encounter it.

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