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# Promoting Learning Development as an Academic Discipline

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## *Abstract*

Over the past ten years, Learning Development has become an established practice in many UK universities. Whilst this practice is generally understood and valued by students, its associated epistemology and community of practice is generally not perceived as an academic discipline in its own right by other academics, managers or policy makers. Recently, there has been a move within the Learning Development community to address the challenge of enabling it to discover its 'voice' as a discipline within the conversation of disciplines. In addition, the current economic climate makes it desirable for the Learning Development community to organise and promote itself as a research-informed discipline so that its professional practice will not be over-embedded or absorbed within faculties to the detriment of students.

Firstly, the current level of maturity of the practice of Learning Development in the UK is considered. Secondly, ways in which the Learning Development community might move forward are explored by considering three case studies of disciplinarity: two external to Learning Development, namely Communications Theory and Educational Development; and one internal to it, namely Mathematics Support. Thirdly, with reference to data provided at a workshop on this subject, relevant approaches identified in these case studies are applied to Learning Development. Finally, Learning Development's progress towards the status of a discipline is discussed in comparison with the other case studies.

**Keywords:** Learning Development; educational development; mathematics support; communications theory; theory of disciplines.

## *Introduction*

Over the past ten years Learning Development (LD) has become an established practice in many UK universities (Hartley et al., 2011). This can be seen partly as a response to the challenges of Widening Participation (HEFCE, 2006), internationalisation (Luxon and Peelo, 2009) and the massification of Higher Education (HE) (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007) which have had a major impact on UK HE policies and practices. Whilst the practice of LD is generally understood and valued by students who use its services, its associated epistemology and community of practice is generally not perceived as an academic discipline in its own right (Becher, 1989) by other academics or by managers or policy makers. Recently, the LD community has been seeking to address the challenge of discovering its 'voice' as a discipline within the conversation of disciplines. In addition, the current economic climate makes it desirable for the LD community to organise and promote itself as a research-informed discipline so that its professional practice will not be over-embedded and potentially absorbed to the detriment of students.

The purpose of this article is to address the following questions:

- What is meant by a discipline and the current position of LD within the conversation of disciplines?
- Where is LD now, both at an individual and a community level?
- How have other emerging disciplines addressed similar challenges?
- In the light of this, what can LD professionals take forward for their personal development and the LD community take forward for the development of its disciplinarity?
- How might this strengthen LD's voice amidst the conversation of disciplines?

This article begins by exploring the need for LD to be promoted as a discipline within the conversation of disciplines. This is followed by the case studies evaluating the nature and current level of disciplinarity of Communications Theory, Educational Development and Mathematics Support. The penultimate section provides an evaluation of the nature and current level of maturity of LD as a discipline. The final section provides a discussion on the current level of progress of LD towards discipline status with reference to these other case studies.

## *Promoting Learning Development amongst the conversation of disciplines*

### Definitions of disciplines

The practice of identifying and using disciplines in academia can be traced back at least to the University of Paris the 13th Century (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009). Becher (1989) promotes the viewing of academic disciplines as **tribes** with their own **territories**: tribes imply both social organisation and an individual academic subculture; territories imply epistemological organisation leading to disciplinary coherence with clear boundaries, leading to the use of terms such as **foundations**, **fields**, **areas** and **turf wars**.

According to Craig (2008b), over-reliance on the epistemological perspective leads to the **foundationalist fallacy**, where every discipline is only perceived in terms of a specific branch on a large tree of knowledge. This model does not allow the emergence of new interdisciplinary disciplines, such as nanotechnologies. However, over-rejection of this perspective leads to the **administrative convenience fallacy**, where discipline boundaries are applied purely for the purposes of administration and bear no relationship with their epistemological areas.

Apart from this traditional model, Shotter (1997, p.42) provides an alternative definition of a discipline as ‘a conversational community with a tradition of argumentation’. Furthermore, Craig (2008a, p.8) defines disciplines as ‘discursive formations that emerge, evolve, transform and dissipate in the on-going conversation of disciplines’. He also defines the term **practical discipline** to describe a discipline which ‘recursively cultivates the very social practices that constitute the discipline’s specific subject matter’ (Craig, 2008a, p.3). Abbott (2001, p.4) emphasises the social power struggle between disciplines. He observed that ‘most current views of intellectual succession are externalist; knowledge is somehow wed to power and power propels change’.

### Alternative perspectives for evaluating disciplines

Disciplines can also be viewed from:

- An **intellectual perspective** in terms of classic and current texts, theories, problems, methods and modes of analysis (Craig, 2008b).

- An **institutional perspective** in terms of the existence of universities, departments, professional organisations, funding agencies, publishers, libraries, and databases (Craig, 2008b).
- A **sociocultural perspective** in terms of the ordinary concepts more or less deeply ingrained in cultural belief systems and habits of the general society (Craig, 2008b). This is particularly important for practical disciplines (see above).
- A **socioeconomic perspective** in terms of their relevance to the knowledge economy (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Some important factors for this perceptive are managerialism, internationalisation, and viewing students as consumers or customers with their increased fees, increased expectations and increased concerns about employability.
- A **scholarship of teaching and learning perspective** (Boyer, 1990) by evaluating the level of research into educational scholarship within the discipline.

## Perceiving Learning Development as a discipline

Most academics that are aware of the existence of LD would probably agree that it is a subset of, or closely associated with, Educational Development and also that it is, in some sense, a movement. Perceiving LD as a discipline provides an additional perspective, both for the LD community to perceive themselves and for those outside the community to perceive them. It provides a model for potential areas of development based on the evaluation criteria described below. It also has the potential to encourage greater networking in that it requires LD practitioners to consider how they should participate in the 'conversation of the disciplines' and who they should 'talk' to. Disciplinarity is also a recognisable discourse for academics and senior management which might encourage a greater valuing and rewarding of LD staff. As Rust (2009, p.4) suggests, the key is to bring about 'a paradigm shift in the thinking of academics across the sector'. Perceiving LD as a discipline could also increase its credibility by promoting it as an area of specialist expertise, although this potential credibility is limited by the current lack of nationally established entry route into posts of learning developer in UK HE such as an academic qualification or a professional accreditation (Cash and Hilsdon, 2008).

One major issue concerning this perception is the need to develop an **agreed tradition of argumentation** within the LD community. An analysis of discussions on the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN) JISCMail list (http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ldhen; accessed 23 November 2012) (Cash and Hilsdon, 2008)

and legacy outputs from the LearnHigher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) (http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/; accessed 23 November 2012), such as (Hartley et al., 2011), provide a starting point for establishing this tradition. In particular, Shahabudin (2009) collated an overview of LearnHigher research into effective learning resources. Her report begins to identify the basis of a research methodology for LD and an associated theoretical standpoint predicated on the need to accommodate 'complexity' in social science methodologies, as described by Haggis (2008). However, one potential issue with this is the ability of LD staff to carry out and publish research to promote LD in an appropriately complex way, as they may naturally overemphasise qualitative and interpretive research. Some of these issues have been identified with the Mathematics Support sub-area of LD in an initiative to measure and improve its effectiveness, as mentioned in its Case Study Section below.

### Combined list of perspectives for perceiving disciplines

Based on the above definitions and perceptions, the following perspectives for evaluating the nature and current level of disciplinarity are proposed and have been used in the case studies and the evaluation of LD below:

- **Intellectual**, in terms of created artefacts, including surveys.
- **Sociocultural**: relevance to society, including the **student perspective**.
- **Economic**.
- **Institutional entrenchment** (physical).
- **Research community of practice** (social).
- **Professional development/scholarship of teaching and learning**.
- **International capital** – the extent to which the discipline is recognised internationally.

## *Case study one: Communications Theory*

### Introduction

This summary is based closely on *Communication as a Field and Discipline* (Craig, 2008a), which is concerned with the historical development and academic-professional institutionalization of Communication Studies, and *Communication in the Conversation of Disciplines* (Craig, 2008b), which explores the nature of Communication Theory from a

theory of disciplinarity in which every discipline derives its identity and coherence from its participation in the conversation of disciplines. Communications Theory has been chosen because of Craig's work to develop an evaluation framework of disciplinarity and apply it to this field. It also acts, in a loose sense, as a control as it has little relationship with LD.

In terms of its nature, Craig (2008a, p.675) described the field of communication as 'highly diverse in methods, theories, and objects of study'. In terms of the etymology of the English word **communication** he continues by stating that it 'originally referred to acts of sharing or making common but without the distinctively modern emphasis on communication as a process of sharing symbols, information and meaning' (Craig, 2008a, pp.675-676). Communication's status as a discipline and/or an interdisciplinary field has been debated internationally at least since the 1980s (Gerbner, 1983).

## Sociocultural relevance

Craig (2008b, pp.16-17) describes the sociocultural relevance of Communications Theory as follows:

> Common sense ideas and practices of communication have evolved in historically specific circumstances. This has been intensely the case in the USA, where the communication discipline first took root. Fears, hopes, and practical opportunities arising from the on-going development of mass media and communication technology certainly have had a large role in this process. The idea of communication also resonates strongly with themes in American culture such as individualism and the drive toward self-improvement, faith in technology and progress, and the chronically expressed need for stronger bonds of social community under conditions of sociocultural diversity and rapid change. The eruption of the communication idea around the world in globalized forms and in culturally adapted localized forms needs to be understood within the general process of economic and cultural globalization with all its attendant puzzles and controversies. The rapid international growth of the academic communication field is bound up in ways we have yet to understand with the emergence of 'communication' as a keyword in global culture. Understanding this relationship is an urgent research problem at the discipline's foundation.

He continues by summarising Deetz's (1994) argument:

> The fundamental social problems that both explain and call for the emergence of a communication discipline are not simply found in the world but are constituted by particular ways of engaging with the world…Disciplinary coherence will be found only in our engagement with this problematization of communication both globally and locally. (Craig, 2008b, p.17)

## Institutional entrenchment

In terms of institutional entrenchment Craig (2008b, p.16) explains that 'Communication is not yet well entrenched…and its intellectual contributions, while hardly negligible, are not yet of such weight as to explain its apparent emergence toward disciplinary status'.

## International capital

In terms of international representations of Communications Theory, Craig (2008a, p.678) states that 'academic communication and media studies programs in the USA are numerous, well established, and often include a broader range of subfields than programs in other countries' and 'journalism schools were founded in Latin America beginning in the 1930s and '40s'.

In general terms, Craig (2008a, p.678) describes the emergence of the research dimension of Communications Theory as developing 'slowly beginning in the 1960s but more quickly in recent years'. More specifically, he observes that 'communication research did not really take off as an organized academic field in Western Europe until the 1970s and in Eastern Europe and Russia until the post-Soviet period in the 1990s' (Craig, 2008a, p.679). In sub-Saharan Africa, Craig (2008a, p.680) continues, 'communication education and media studies are beginning to develop…despite the post-colonial legacy of economic and political problems that continues to affect academic and media institutions across much of the continent'. In terms of the Arab World, Craig (2008a, p.680) states, 'having grown rapidly since the 1980s, the communication field is more densely developed…, where at least 70 academic programs currently exist in universities across the region'. In terms of Israel he relates, 'the field…has developed differently from other countries of the region since the founding in 1966 of the Communication Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as the first Israeli institution for communication studies' (Craig, 2008a, p.680).

For South Asian countries (India, Pakistan and nearby countries) Craig (2008a, p.681) observes, 'the field of communication grew from university based journalism education, and from research projects sponsored by international foundations and agencies primarily concerned with the functions of media and communication in national development'. In terms of East Asia he continues, 'the communication field is burgeoning…and shows promise of important theoretical contributions spurred by efforts to adapt the discipline to Asian cultural traditions' (Craig, 2008a, p.680). Finally, in terms of the Southeast Asian and Pacific region, he states, 'communication, journalism, and media studies programs are developing…, most prominently in Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, but also in other countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand' (Craig, 2008a, p.680).

The field of Communication Theory and Studies is served by two international academic associations of worldwide scope: the International Communication Association (http://www.icahdq.org/; accessed 23 November 2012) and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (http://iamcr.org/; accessed 23 November 2012).

## *Case study two: Educational Development*

This case study is based closely on that presented at a workshop on this subject (Samuels and Reid, 2011).

### Introduction

As Gosling's (2008) report on Education Development (ED) in the UK shows, ED has now become well established in UK Higher Education Institutions, with the majority of universities having an ED unit. These units are primarily responsible for the professional development of staff relating to teaching and learning, and also for enhancing teaching quality within the institution.

### Sociocultural relevance

The emergence of ED can be linked to changes in pedagogy from an emphasis on 'teaching' to an emphasis on 'learning', and also a greater focus on widening participation. Government initiatives to ensure quality in teaching were more direct influence. Gosling's data shows that spikes in the numbers and profile of ED units follow government policies

and funding: firstly, the Dearing Report (1997) recommendation that every institution requires professional development for all new teaching staff; secondly, the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/howfund/archive/teachingqualityenhancementfund/; accessed 23 November 2012) funding between 1999 and 2009; and thirdly, the Higher Education Funding Council (1999) requirement for institutions to have a learning and teaching strategy.

It is likely this influence will continue with the Browne Review's (2010) recommendation to make public the proportions of teaching-active staff holding teaching qualifications for each subject in each institution. Gosling (2008, p.3) observes that such increased involvement in implementing institutional and governmental policies has led to a potential tension between the 'managerial functions required of ED staff and their own allegiances to academic values'.

## Intellectual artefacts

Although numbers of ED units increased primarily as an institutional response to the needs for staff development, ED has developed a growing body of research. Gosling (2008, p.1) reports that '72.5% of ED units now see undertaking or contributing to pedagogic research as part of their function'.

Bath and Smith (2004) identify 14 different academic journals related to Higher Education in which ED scholars have published their work. SEDA (http://www.seda.ac.uk/; accessed 23 November 2012) also has a range of academic publications including: a journal (Innovations in Education and Teaching International); papers and short monographs; a magazine (Education Developments); and a book imprint with Routledge.

The most significant survey of ED to date has been Gosling's 2008 report 'Educational Development in the United Kingdom', written for the Heads of Educational Development Group and based on research into the ED units at 43 HE Institutions. Although Gosling (2008, p.3) found that 'Educational development is an accepted part of most UK HE Institutions, and its central purposes are now well established', he goes on to conclude that the institutional location and sources of funding for ED still varies greatly depending on institutional context, and it is still a very much contested role.

### Research community of practice

To some extent, ED has been able to link itself with the broader academic community surrounding education research. Historically, in some HE Institutions, ED units started within Departments of Education in order to enable accreditation of their postgraduate certificates in education. This connection to this wider discipline has been maintained through similar areas of research and interest.

Bath and Smith (2004) make the case for ED to claim its 'tribal territory' as an academic discipline. They emphasise that of all the areas of academic work (research, teaching, service), research is the key to being able to make this claim: Educational Developers 'must acknowledge that their work is defensible by reference to a high quality research in the discipline, and that it is academic work by its very nature' (Bath and Smith, 2004, p.25).

### Professional development

The Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) was formed in 1993 and is the professional association for ED in the UK. It has a comprehensive, unified approach to professional development through its accreditation framework, fellowships scheme, national events, and summer school.

### International capital

ED has an international organisation – the International Consortium for Educational Development (http://icedonline.net/; accessed 23 November 2012) which was formed in 1993 and meets annually. There are strong traditions of Educational Development in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, USA and New Zealand. Bath and Smith (2004) identify 8 different professional bodies for ED worldwide.

## *Case study three: Mathematics Support*

### Introduction

Mathematics Support is 'any extra, optional, non-compulsory programme or facility that assists students in developing mathematical and/or statistical confidence and skills during their enrolled study in a degree course, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, but with no credit associated with the learning support programme' (MacGillivray and Croft, 2011, p.189). The existence of Mathematics Support centres in UK HE can be traced back to 1990, and possibly earlier in UK Further Education. The Mathematics Support community

of practice in UK HE came into existence through the First National Conference on Mathematics Support hosted by the University of Luton in 1993. The status of Mathematics Support as a practical discipline is discussed by Samuels (2007) and Samuels and Patel (2010).

## Sociocultural relevance

Lawson and others (2003, p.5) argue that the main reason for the emergence of Mathematics Support provisions is the 'mismatch between students' mathematical confidence, knowledge and skills at university entry and those required in order to commence their degree courses'. They also suggest a second reason for its emergence is 'the increasing breadth of variation of mathematical and statistical competences of students entering the same university courses' (Lawson et al., 2003, p.5).

## Professional development

In 2003, a booklet of guidelines on good practice in the provision of Mathematics Support centres was produced based on the expertise of experienced practitioners (Lawson et al., 2003). In 2005, the University of Minnesota produced a Peer Tutor Handbook for its undergraduate peer math tutors (General College Math Center, 2005). There is no general certified qualification in Mathematics Support in the UK. However, Loughborough University runs a Postgraduate Certificate in Mathematics Support and Dyslexia and Dyscalculia in Further and Higher Education (http://pgcert.lboro.ac.uk/; accessed 23 November 2012). The **sigma** Network recently ran workshops for postgraduate students on how to tutor in a maths support centre. The content of these workshops has now been turned into a guide for postgraduate students (Croft and Grove, 2011).

## Intellectual artefacts

The initial conference at the University of Luton in 1993 led to the establishment of the Mathematics Support Association which produced eight newsletters (http://www.sigma-cetl.ac.uk/index.php?section=80; accessed 23 November 2012). After it was disbanded in 1999, publications by community members mainly switched to the Higher Education Academy's subject centre for Mathematics Statistics and Operations Research newsletter: *Connections* (http://mathstore.ac.uk/?q=node/58; accessed 23 November 2012) and the CETL-MSOR annual conference proceedings (http://www.mathstore.ac.uk/?q=node/2049; accessed 23 November 2012). The **sigma** Centre for Excellence in Teaching and

Learning (http://www.sigma-cetl.ac.uk/; accessed 23 November 2012) was able to build on this body and publish peer reviewed articles.

The UK Mathematics Support community of practice has so far carried out and reported on four surveys into the extent of provision in the UK. Of these, the surveys by Beveridge (1997) and Perkin and Croft (2004) were the most thorough in terms of using several forms of inquiry and attempting to approach several people at each institution. From these two surveys it is concluded that at least 50% of all UK HE Institutions had a Mathematics Support drop-in workshop or drop-in centre at the time they were questioned.

## Research community of practice

Research into Mathematics Support can be considered to have begun with Beveridge's (1993) description of the Minnesota model of developmental maths. However, little research was carried out by the community until the establishment of the **sigma** CETL in 2005 which, in the period up until 2010, employed several research staff and PhD students (Samuels, 2006). It has also organised an annual conference since 2005 (http://www.mathstore.ac.uk/?q=node/2049; accessed 23 November 2012). This research community has since shrunk after the end of the CETL funding. However, interest was recently shown into a systematic research programme to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of mathematics support centres (http://www.mathcentre.ac.uk/courses/mathematics-support-centre/measuring-effectivess/; accessed 23 November 2012) culminating in a publication by MacGillivray and Croft (2011) and a workshop organised by the **sigma** Network (http://sigma-network.ac.uk/resources/evaluating-and-measuring-effectiveness-in-mathematics-support-provision; accessed 23 November 2012).

## International capital

The communities of practice in Australia and the Republic of Ireland have reached a sufficient level of maturity to carry out and publish surveys into their levels of provision. MacGillivray (2008) reports that 32 of the 39 universities in Australia have some form of mathematics learning support. Gill and others (2008) report there were 13 tertiary mathematics support centres in the Republic of Ireland. There is also a provision in many universities in the USA, commonly referred to as zero credit courses, but there is not such a level of inter-state coordination as in these countries.

## *Evaluation of Learning Development as a discipline*

In this section the nature and current level of disciplinarity of Learning Development is explored from a variety of perspectives. The unattributed views expressed here are summarised from those provided at a workshop on the subject at the ALDinHE 2011 conference (Samuels and Reid, 2011).

### Economic perspective

Most LD units are funded centrally. Unlike other disciplines, LD may benefit from the 2012 UK tuition fees increase because of increased pressure on universities to deliver a quality student experience with the Office for Fair Access (http://www.offa.org.uk/; accessed 23 November 2012) potentially providing a lever. LD centres also have other income generating potential, including research funding, national teaching fellowships, university teaching awards and developing resources, courses and services for external clients.

The value for money of LD centres is quite closely linked to their influence on retention. This puts these centres in a precarious position if this should change. They also provide economic value to their institutions when they are able to initiate advances in or changes to learning methods.

### Sociocultural relevance

From a positive perspective, LD fosters and nurtures participation, crosses multiple boundaries, and attempts to demystify learning. From an uncertain or neutral perspective: LD is a necessary service in order to fortify students' purposes, roles and functions in the context of their holistic development; and it has developed in a particular set of social, cultural and historical circumstances. From a negative perspective, LD can be seen to only promote mediocrity and is only as relevant as students perceive it to be.

According to Bell (2011), students perceive LD as being a separate provision independent from their course and assessment regimes. However, for LD centres also providing English language assessment and teaching, this view may be blurred, especially following the recent changes to UK Border Agency (UKBA, 2011) regulations on English proficiency for international students. Notwithstanding this, LD staff can act as intermediaries between tutor feedback and their academic development (Turner, 2011). Students often find LD staff to be informative; in particular, they see them as providers of learning resources.

Because of their neutral role, students can find LD staff to be more interested in them as individuals who care about their learning. However, some find them to be irrelevant. According to Foster and others (2011) this view might demonstrate their overconfidence in how transferable their post 16-education is to their university study. Other students find them to be too generic and therefore not having the same 'authority' as their subject tutors. Others view them as support staff and would therefore only consider approaching them for 'remedial' help. However, it is probably the case that, despite the best efforts of LD centres to advertise themselves, the majority of students are still unaware that they exist.

## Intellectual resources

LD's intellectual resources can be described in terms of their intended audience:

- **Internal facing resources**: LD now has its own journal (the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/ojs/index.php?journal=jldhe; accessed 23 November 2012). It also has reports from the LearnHigher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and resources from the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) conferences.
- **External facing resources**: there are many good websites and text books on academic writing, study skills and other areas of LD.
- **Research resources**: LD's body of research literature is still emerging. There is a need to formalise the nature of research in the field in order to give it greater validity. The outcome of some LD research should be to identify issues in learning. Research into students' perception of LD often lacks generalizability due to proportionately less unsatisfied students tending to reply to feedback requests. The self-selecting nature of most LD interventions means it is normally impossible to establish control groups to evaluate the effectiveness of LD interventions.

The LD community needs to reflect on its LearnHigher CETL legacy and consider ways in which to take it forward.

## Institutional entrenchment

Although no formal survey has been carried out into the extent and position of LD centres in UK HE, it is considered that most HE Institutions have some form of LD centre, with the majority being situated as a centralised provision, as is also the case in American

universities. There are opposing views over their relationship with Educational Development with some universities running a merged provision for staff and students and others providing separate services. Some LD provisions are also embedded within academic departments and faculties.

### Professional development/scholarship of teaching and learning

LD draws on a wide range of professional and intellectual traditions. Experience often plays an important role in becoming an LD practitioner. The Higher Education Academy's UK Professional Standards Framework (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf; accessed 23 November 2012) may threaten this. There is a growing awareness of the need for professional development and a move towards more certification. One drawback is the general lack of links between LD and Education departments.

### International capital

There is currently no international organisation for LD. However, NACADA (The National Academic Advising Association – see http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/; accessed 23 November 2012) is an organisation representing the international community of academic advisors.

On a regional level, in the USA, the main model of LD is that of **writing centres**. This provides a possible direction for UK-based LD centres to emulate. There is a tension with the USA descriptive model of prescription. California State University runs a website called MERLOT, standing for (Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching, http://www.merlot.org/merlot; accessed 23 November 2012). There are similar movements in Australasia. LD does not yet have a high profile in Europe. However, organisations such as the European First Year Experience conference (http://www.efye.eu/; accessed 23 November 2012) are beginning to address LD-related concerns across the continent.

## *Discussion*

Since its inception, Learning Development has clearly made progress towards being recognised as a discipline in its own right. Its resonance and identification with student learning means it is, to some extent, a practical discipline, according to Craig's (2008a)

definition. In terms of its current overall status as a discipline, LD is clearly far behind Communications Theory and is also behind ED in many areas. However, the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education provide it with the infrastructure for a strong community of practice in the UK and beyond, and some LD practitioners are developing excellent external facing resources in many LD subject areas. At the international level, LD is recognised in some other countries, as might be expected when comparing it with ED and Mathematics Support.

The LD research community and its associated intellectual resources are still emerging, although it has clearly benefitted from the influence of the LearnHigher CETL and the establishment of its own journal. Insufficient research has so far been carried out into the status of LD to provide a detailed and nuanced picture for the field, similar to those drawn by Craig (2008a; 2008b) for Communications Theory and Gosling (2009) for ED. The LD community could also learn lessons from the progress made by the Mathematics Support community, especially in terms of its systematic surveys into the current level of provision of Mathematics Support (both in the UK and further afield) and its efforts to establish a research programme into measuring and improving effectiveness of Mathematics Support provisions. Such an emphasis, with a more firmly established tradition of argumentation, would assist LD to become recognised and respected by HE managers and policy makers.

In terms of finding its voice within the conversation of disciplines, LD's relationship with ED could benefit from being clarified. In addition, its relationship with education needs to be improved in terms of the academic and professional recognition of LD staff. This might lead to an increase in the recognition of its staff as teachers and reflective practitioners, not just as tutors or advisors. It could be accomplished, in part, through the LD community adopting a greater emphasis on a scholarship of teaching and learning approach to its own practices.

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