

Associations in collaboration: how the first BALEAP and ALDinHE joint one-day conference came about

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Abstract

In this article, we outline the thinking leading up to a collaborative event, shared by two professional associations. The event is briefly described, but our main aim here is to encourage colleagues not only to attend such gatherings, but also to seriously consider holding a similar event.

Keywords: collaboration; ALDinHE; BALEAP; academic literacies.

Context for collaboration

Historically, ALDinHE (the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education) members had limited opportunities, beyond an annual conference, to network and share best practice. To start to address this, ALDinHE launched a regional symposium scheme in 2014 whereby member universities were encouraged to arrange and host themed events where practitioners could meet and share ideas/challenges. Events were supported by ALDinHE financially and in terms of planning logistics. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to regional symposia and since launching, around twenty regional events have taken place, attended by circa 400 delegates.

The ALDinHE Steering Group agreed in 2016 to explore expanding the regional symposium remit to include co-hosting events with other higher education associations. This was seen as potentially a necessary development given the growing national trends around super converged services whereby Learning Development professionals

work alongside other student development staff, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Tutors, Educational Developers and Librarians.

At the 2017 ALDinHE conference, a session was held to explore cross-association synergies and the possibility for future collaborations between ALDinHE and other educational associations. Invitations to attend were accepted by representatives from the Global Forum for English for Academic Purposes Professionals (BALEAP)¹, the Staff and Education Development Association (SEDA)², the Sigma network³ and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)⁴ (Buckley et al. 2017). This session indicated there was a strong community consensus that there was a need for cross-association collaborations in order to meet changing needs of members. As such, it was agreed that there would be real benefits to arranging cross-association events.

The first collaboration – Academic literacies and EAP: same or different? University of Essex, 24 November, 2018

The first ALDinHE cross-association event was run in partnership with BALEAP in November 2018 at the University of Essex. It was decided that academic literacies (Lea and Street, 1998) would be both a relevant and familiar topic to both EAP Tutors and Learning Developers and provide a good foundation for collaborative discussions. Accordingly, the theme of the event suggested that participants might explore areas of contrast and overlap in our remits, roles, and practices. The event uptake was excellent and over 100 delegates attended. The full conference programme and a selection of presentation recordings is available at: <https://www.baleap.org/event/academic-literacies>.

¹ <https://www.baleap.org/>

² <https://www.seda.ac.uk/>

³ <http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.cilip.org.uk/>

It was intended that the day should provide as much opportunity as possible for cross-association networking and sharing of ideas so a keynote was not arranged. Rather, the day comprised many stimulating and constructive workshops, discussions and presentations delivered by attendees. These covered topics including academic skills, oracy, online learning and collaborative practice. The day closed with a panel discussion (comprising Liz Austin, Steve Briggs, Tracey Costley, and Maxine Gilway) which pulled together the day's themes.

A number of practice-related questions emerged throughout the day which, whilst discussed at length, could not be conclusively answered. These included:

- Is learning development an academic literacy?
- How and when do EAP and learning development overlap?
- What is unique about the professional identities/roles of Learning Developers and EAP Tutors?

Responses to such questions, which provide a thought-provoking opportunity for practitioners to reflect on their own practice/professional status and offer a rich context for future discussions between ALDinHE and BALEAP members, are inevitably varied and individualised. The day was not intended to produce definitive answers, but to prompt discussion and debate.

Feedback from attendees

Delegate feedback indicated that the day provided a great opportunity to network and opportunities to reflect on similarities and differences between the EAP and learning development fields:

'It was good to talk to both EAP and LD staff about approaches in different institutions.'

‘I learned a great deal about practices in other institutions and also about the relationships that are being established or are emerging between EAP departments and academic development units.’

‘Primarily I took away the feeling that others working in very different roles are also interested in understanding our work holistically and finding common ground.’

‘To be quite honest I learnt something from every sessions I attended.’

There was a real feeling that the collaboration between the two associations had provided a valuable space within which to explore the theme and become more familiar with colleagues from each group.

Paving the way for future collaborations

The ALDinHE and BALEAP event has already led to future cross-association collaboration. Most notably it provided the catalyst for producing this special academic literacies issue of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*. In addition to bringing together a host of excellent articles from members of the BALEAP and ALDinHE communities, the journal production process has provided opportunities for members of ALDinHE and BALEAP to work collaboratively as guest editors.

The benefits of collaborating with BALEAP has also prompted ALDinHE to embark on a number of other cross-association collaborations. For example:

- Members of ScotELA (Scottish Association for Learning Development Professionals) remotely attended an ALDinHE recognition scheme writing retreat in May 2019.
- Carina Buckley (ALDinHE co-chair) delivered a keynote at the 2019 SEDA conference.

- ALDinHE and the Sigma network co-ran a regional symposium in July 2019 focused around the theme of 'differentiation' (attended by 30 practitioners from 18 different institutions).

Many university EAP and Learning Development teams are already in the age of cross-team collaboration and it is certain that others will follow. It is therefore becoming increasingly important that practitioners are familiar with cross-disciplinary issues and appreciate nuances between different roles. Collaborations between professional associations provide a perfect opportunity to start to build such bridges. Given the success of the Essex event, it is certain that more collaborative events between ALDinHE, BALEAP and other educational associations are required and should be arranged.

References

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