

## **Learning in Higher Education symposia: A new professional development model for university educators**

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This report presents the findings of a case study of a novel professional development practice model for academic university staff developed by the Learning in Higher Education (LiHE) association. It describes the implementation of a social constructivist approach to professional development, characterised by various, structured collaborative activities, and possible levels of participation. The findings expand current understandings of new professional development initiatives for university educators that aim to move beyond the classical conference model. Specifically, this study documents the expectations and experiences of participants of the first Australian LiHE symposium. It explores in detail participant awareness of and reactions to the constructivist nature of this new professional development model.

### **Introduction**

The acceptance of the shift away from traditional transmission pedagogies, which render the learner as a passive recipient of information to be absorbed, to more active learning and teaching approaches aligned with constructivist learning theories, acknowledges the idea of the social construction of meaning. How this now well established and accepted learning paradigm is positioned alongside traditional professional development activities for university educators, such as conference participation, has inspired the development of a new model for university educators. Learning in Higher Education (LiHE) is an international association, which was founded in 2007 to implement an alternative professional development model for university educators. It sought to push the boundaries of traditional conference participation and design for the provision of deeply constructivist conference experiences of delegates (Nygaard & Holtham, 2008; Nygaard, Courtney, & Holtham, 2011). In order to explain epistemological and practical agreement between design intent, enactment and experience of any reform practice, such as the LiHE symposium events, a formal, preferably interpretive evaluation is needed (Kelliher, 2005; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009).

This report presents the findings of a case study of the sixth such event, the LiHE Australia symposium, which had as its main goal the joint production of a themed anthology. The symposium was held in Sydney, New South Wales from 27 November 2011 to 1 December 2011. The primary purpose of this study is to provide a snapshot of the cycle of design, enactment and reflection of the LiHE professional development model. It was triggered by a perceived need to understand how experienced university educators from various discipline backgrounds and nations describe their individual and collective experience and grapple with meaning making in novel and unfamiliar situations. The study utilises a grounded theory approach and is informed by sociocultural theory.

In the next section, the main features and aims of the LiHE symposium model are outlined, illustrating how the symposium design aligns with constructivist ideas of transformative learning. The second section presents a brief outline of the research aim, scope and design. The third and fourth sections present the results and discuss the findings. Finally, some conclusions are drawn and possible implications for the implementation of novel professional development models are outlined.

## **The main features and aims of the LiHE symposium model**

The designers of the LiHE symposium model argue that their approach mitigates perceived shortcomings of the classical professional development model, which is transmission based. They plan to offer professional learning experiences for academics that take account of the new developments in the learning sciences (Nygaard & Holtham, 2008). For example, participants of constructivist and transformational learning experiences are expected to become deeply engaged in the teaching and learning process, discussing and debating emerging topics and issues with each other. These activities provide opportunities for the rigorous testing of ideas, the review of taken for granted beliefs and values and the active and collaborative production of new knowledge (Neary, 2009) and self (Giroux, 2010; Rupp et al, 2010).

These ideas of collaborative knowledge creation are apparent in the symposium design (see Figure 1 below). The need to move away from traditional conference participation models is also supported by the documentation provided on the LiHE website. The founder of the association, Claus Nygaard, explains as follows.

Usually you'll spend 1-2 months preparing your conference paper. It's a lot of hard work. And you do that to get your 20 minutes of fame. When you get back from the conference, you have to consider publishing the paper, which may well mean 1-2 years of continuous work with editing, revising, submission etc. In the process you're more or less on your own and have only limited (if any) contact with the people you met at the conference (Learning in Higher Education, 2011, Philosophy webpage).

The above statement makes explicit the value of professional networking. Classical conferences provide opportunities for university educators to present their research, form professional connections and advance academic work. However, the designers of the LiHE symposium model were of the view that opportunities needed to be created for university educators to engage in transdisciplinary collaborative exchanges for individual and collective advancement of a particular field and to publish their collective works in a timely fashion.

The LIHE symposium/anthology production model is a staged process that commences with tentative idea constructions and finishes with a manuscript in press shortly after the conclusion of the symposium (see Table 1):

Table 1: Stages of the LIHE symposium/anthology model

Stage No	Stage theme	Description
# 1	Anthology theme development	Anthology theme development through dialogic exchange and idea generation between facilitators and participants of an earlier LIHE symposium.
# 2	Symposium call	A call for chapter proposals by a certain due date for the next LIHE symposium is placed on the LIHE website and email alerts are sent to members and international university departments.
# 3	Chapter proposal reviews	Double blind reviews of chapter proposals are conducted by international reviewers drawn from the pool of previous LIHE participants.
# 4	Accepted chapter proposals	Authors of accepted chapter proposals are invited to submit a complete chapter by a certain due date.
# 5	Complete chapter reviews	A second round of double blind reviews are conducted of complete chapters.
# 6	Accepted chapters	All accepted chapter authors are required to engage in a peer review process of up to two chapters and provide constructive feedback in writing prior to the commencement of the symposium.
# 7	Symposium participation	Authors of accepted chapters partake in a four day symposium to move from individual chapter construction to a coherent anthology production.
# 8	Post-symposium reviews	Following the symposium all revised chapters are reviewed by the publishing company.
# 9	Final review	Pre-publication of the anthology, all revised chapters undergo a final check by the editors of the anthology.

The case study reported here only documented and evaluated the LiHE Australia symposium process, which effectively represents stage 7 of the anthology production process. The above table and elaboration by the LiHE symposium designers make apparent the importance of the formal and rigorous review processes employed to arrive at a level of topical anthology chapters that withstand scrutiny. However, dissimilar to other edited academic book production processes, the LiHE symposium model intends to provide an avenue for deep collaboration and professional networking, similar to the purpose of conferences. Claus Nygaard explains.

Our philosophy with the symposium series 'Learning in Higher Education' is to bring together a small group of researchers (maximum 25 people) to write an international anthology. The chapters written for the symposium/anthology will be circulated among the participants, and we will form focused discussion/review groups that give constructive feedback to the authors during the symposium. We will address the questions [that are] on your mind, and focus our discussions around ways in which such questions can be answered. We will

spend the days together at the symposium helping you to write the best possible chapter for our anthology (LIHE – Philosophy, 2011).

Contrasting traditional conference experiences with those of the LiHE symposium design, it becomes apparent that the former generally invites passive individualist participation (listening to presentations) and the latter invites active participation and collaborative decision making. According to Wang & King (2006),

... the central focal point and power of transformative learning is fundamental change in perspective that transforms the way an adult understands and interacts with his or her world. Reflective thinking is the foundational activity that supports and cultivates such 'perspective transformation (p. 3).

Designing for a transformational professional learning experience, the LiHE symposium delegate is expected to be an active participant, willing and able to partake in intense international and interdisciplinary collaboration through staged and sequenced symposium activities. Hence, a willingness to engage body and mind during the symposium event and be open minded and receptive to ideas and experiences that are novel is presupposed. Resistance to engage with planned transformative learning tasks is not expected from these committed educators, who have already made substantial investments in time and effort to participate in this international event (see Table 1). Therefore, their capability and willingness to find meaningful encounters with their fellow participants and their work is uniformly accepted by the designers of the LIHE symposium model. Nevertheless, Lantolf (2000) pointed out that "while task based instruction could yield positive learning outcomes, there can be no guarantees, because what ultimately matters is how individual learners decide to engage with the task" (p. 13).

## **Research aim, scope and design**

Case study methods are commonly used in combination with sociocultural and grounded theory approaches to document and evaluate intent and application of phenomena that are complex, such as change practices in learning institutions and corporate business (Lantolf, 2000; Yin, 2009). Classic grounded theory is a "highly structured but eminently flexible methodology forming an integrated methodological 'whole' that enables the emergence of conceptual theory" (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 3). Moreover, the primary principles of sociocultural theory are the social construction of meaning and the importance of social, cultural and historic contexts and language to mediate the production of knowledge and insight. Both these theories acknowledge the impossibility of neutrality and objectivity, stressing that all thought and action is underpinned by social, cultural, biological and/or psychological goals (Lantolf, 2000). They are, by their very nature, not concerned with describing phenomena objectively. Rather their aim is to explore the contexts of phenomena, infusing the described reality with interpretation in the development of a coherent narrative account. In line with the assertion made by Carlopio (2009), this case study began with data rather than theory. Hence, the methodology was deemed appropriate for the purpose of this study, which investigated

the idiosyncratic ways meaning is constructed and value is ascribed to a particular professional development experience by both the designers and participants of LiHE Australia.

The symposium experiences of delegates were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations in combination with document analysis of the LiHE symposium design model. The aim was to gather data on the (mis)match between design intent and embodied experience of a new professional learning model. Epistemological alignment between symposium designers and delegates cannot be assumed. The specific research questions were:

- How cognisant are participants of the constructivist nature of the symposium design and the intended process and product outcomes?
- Are LiHE Australia participants displaying patterns of behaviour that illustrate certain levels of cognitive and/or emotional engagement and/or detachment during specific activities?

Interviews were arranged with symposium facilitators and participants during the last two days of the symposium to give delegates time to immerse themselves in the experience. Nineteen formal interviews were conducted as dialogues, using a semi-structured interview format and interview notes were produced with the permission of the participants, which were often read back during the interview to ensure accuracy. All interview questions were open ended and non-directive (e.g., Do you consider yourself to be a constructivist educator?; Tell me about your symposium experience thus far; What was the most memorable experience?; Which experience did you find most/least useful and/or enjoyable?).

In undertaking this investigation, the author also positioned herself as a participant researcher, simultaneously an outsider and an insider. As a researcher and non-chapter-producer, the author is clearly an outsider, not involved in the process of discussion and debate about the various possibilities of producing a suitable and coherent structure and format for the sixth anthology. As a past symposium participant and university educator, partaking in all the academic symposium events, the author clearly occupies an insider position. This close contact with the participants enabled the building of rapport with delegates and the gathering of much contextualised information and insider knowledge. As a result, much of the information conveyed during the interviews and chance conversations were accounts of deeply personal experiences. Not surprisingly, there were multiple requests to ensure that each informant's identity was protected. Therefore, the completed interview and observation data (field notes) were later de-identified.

### **Results: Themed vignettes of embodied experiences**

Through a carefully structured symposium program, the designers of the LiHE symposium model aimed to achieve a balance between intense process work through professional networking and high quality output through the production of a themed

anthology (field notes 30.11.2011). Moreover, it was the intention of the designers to honour the fact that classical conferences often include a social program. Figure 1 illustrates the interwoven nature of the social and professional networking program, including cultural and sports activities. The ability to engage in informal networking was recognised as particularly valuable by designers and delegates alike.

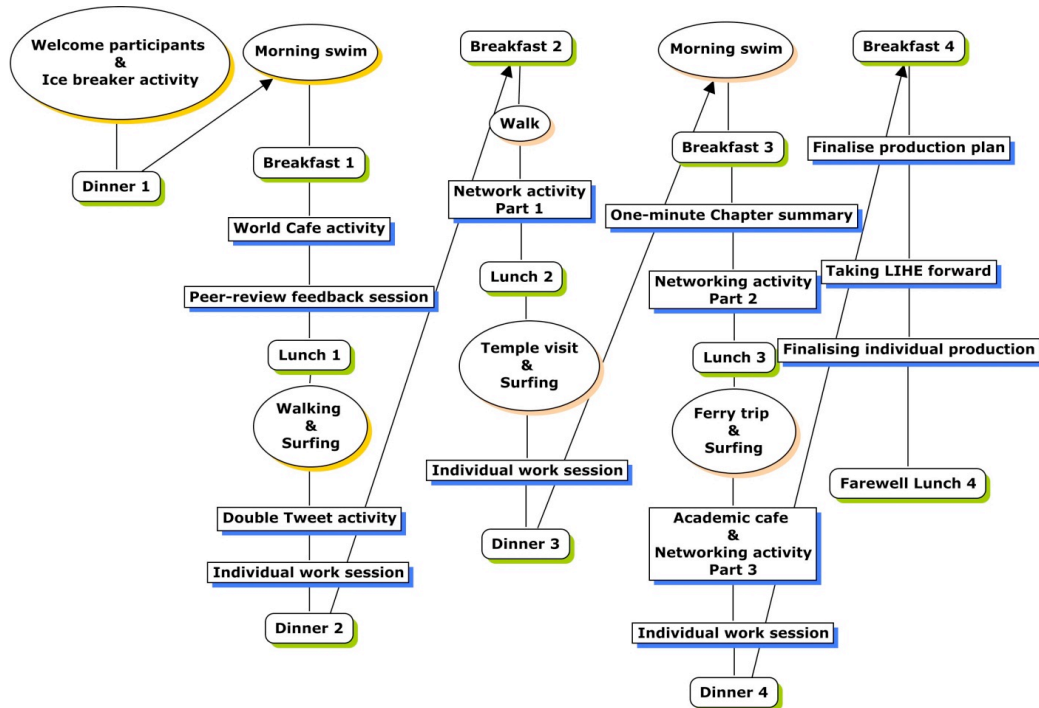


Figure 1: Visual depiction of the integrated nature of the complete LIHE Australia symposium program

All formal symposium activities, which were designed to encourage individual chapter authors to collaborate and network with each, to enable familiarity with other people's work as a precondition for the provision of constructive support and the production of a coherent anthology, are marked in Figure 1 as rectangular shapes (e.g. 'world café activity'; 'double tweet activity', 'peer review session', 'networking activity'). The informal networking activities, consisting of social and cultural programs (i.e. 'walking & surfing' and 'temple visit'), are marked as elliptical shapes. The meal sessions are depicted in Figure 1, using rectangular shapes with round edges.

The following vignettes are a synthesis of multiple, but similar views expressed during the interview sessions by various participants. Throughout the reconstruction of views, actual verbatim accounts of experiences and perceptions were used to provide an authentic account. The interview and observation data are represented as themed vignettes, synthesising the information provided by different participants into a unique story or

vignette. This narrative approach provides additional protection of participants' identities and makes possible the reproduction of verbatim comments of actions and emotions of participants. The names used in the paper are pseudonyms and care has been taken to make them non-descriptive. The results are presented as individual tables of sequenced formal symposium activity descriptions and participant perceptions as conveyed during the interview sessions. These are supplemented with elaborations and discussions based on observation notes taken during and/or after individual activities and symposium events.

Table 2: Icebreaker activity – Day 1

Activity	Description	Participant perception
The Opera: Non-classical icebreaker	After a brief official welcome, it was revealed that everyone, including partners and children, would partake in an opera production, lasting approximately 30 minutes. This icebreaker or team building activity had a lasting effect on the minds of symposium delegates and provided a discussion point throughout the symposium and particularly during interview sessions.	<p><i>Vignette 1: Feeling like in school again'</i></p> <p>We were all asked to assemble in the amphitheatre and line up in three rows. The four children, aged between 10 and 15 stuck close together and laughed nervously. Looking around, I could see that they were not the only ones feeling slightly (or even severely) 'out of place'. And then the opera production began. Some of us were asked to name our favourite song and sing the tune. At that point, I felt great relief that I was standing in the second row and could hide behind a taller woman in the front. I noticed that I felt like 'in school' again, afraid of being noticed by the teacher and asked to do, say or sing something. I was deeply concerned about looking and sounding 'stupid'.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 2: I liked the silliness of it'</i></p> <p>Well, the opera was certainly something different. I enjoyed the different experience and foremost the talented presenter. She had a great talent to improvise and take people along. I have never encountered something like it before. I can't sing, but I wouldn't care less. I liked the silliness of it and think we take ourselves too seriously as academics. It was absolutely hilarious! I was mesmerised by the 'funny woman' at the front, trying hard to get us all to sing and do things that looked like dancing. I loved the way most people got into it and looked really silly. The kids and I certainly had fun, but I equally felt annoyed that we had to do things we didn't know. But thinking back, it is fun to do crazy stuff. I felt definitely 'out of my comfort zone', but then learning is stepping out there and being prepared to 'go for the ride'.</p>

Icebreaker activities, such as the one described in Table 2, are fun social learning tasks designed to aid the community building process. Their function is to help diminish the perceived and/or real distance between symposium participants who are new to a setting and each other. Employing icebreakers is a common practice in many formal learning

settings, but not at traditional conferences. In an environment that requires trusting relationships and active participation, icebreakers fulfil the task of developing a welcoming environment and lay the foundation for the establishment of a 'community' with a shared purpose, literally 'breaking the ice', meaning the idea of diminishing transactional distance (Moore, 1993).

However, the community building process had commenced long before symposium participants met face to face in Sydney. In fact they all had intimate knowledge of at least one other participant's contribution to the anthology under construction and many were keen to deepen their cognitive connection and find the author/s of the paper they were required to critique prior to arriving at the symposium (Field notes, 28.11.2011). Nevertheless, as the various accounts illustrate, the demands placed on symposium participants required a willingness and ability on their part to step out of their comfort zone and embrace the messiness of novel situations. These demands were particularly great for those delegates who had not fully embraced the deeply constructivist nature of the LiHE symposium format and were used to or comfortable with traditional conference (professional learning) structures, which are very different indeed. The messiness of deeply constructivist learning in part arises from the emotional reaction that unfamiliar situations and events invoke, demanding of participants (learners) to take risks, to cope with ambiguity and to engage in 'mess management' (Ackoff, 1974). An extract from the observation notes elaborates this issue.

I was reminded of student and tutor reactions to problem based learning (PBL) initiatives, which have been well documented. The importance of learner factors needs to be taken into consideration when exposing participants to new designs, making unfamiliar and often unwelcome demands. (Field notes 28.11.2011)

The different experiences of the World Café activity are expressions of cultural patterns, which are enactments of deep seated epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning. The pre-specification for given reactions to learning and teaching experiences are brought into being by the dynamic nature of participant expectation and situated experience. It is understandable that some participants are less willing or able to embrace the deeply constructivist (and organic, non-directive) strategies employed during the symposium. Hence, the experience of 'being lost' and 'needing more guidance' may be simply a way of conveying some minor confusion, or, may indeed constitute a dissonance between epistemological positions and teaching and learning paradigms, conveying a role conflict. Employing a traditional, instructionist mindset, the learner expects an 'instructor' to 'instruct', to control the learning process through scaffolded sub-tasks, ensuring that learners cannot 'get lost', but instead are reaching the desired learning outcomes effectively and efficiently, with minimal engagement in 'unproductive' social talk. An extract from the observation notes concerning this event reads as follows:

It seems that the designers of the World Café activity intended participants to engage in various meaning making conversations, detours and social conversations about their role and purpose at their respective universities. Forming a community of practice, these detours seem to be seen as valuable and productive in the production of the anthology



and participation in the symposium. Hence the designers wanted ‘rich’ and ‘divergent’ group conversations, which were a learning outcome in and of itself (Field notes, 28.11.2011).

Table 3: World Café activity – Day 2

Activity	Description	Participant perception
<p>The World Café activity: What do you bring to the symposium/anthology?</p>	<p>This first formal symposium activity was introduced by the facilitators as a multi-staged activity. During stage one, the delegates were asked to explain to each other (a) What they bring to the symposium and (b) What they bring to the anthology. The purpose was to find common ground and link to themes and ideas conveyed by other delegates. In a second stage, each of the delegates was asked to join another table and repeat the exercise, except for the ‘table chairs’, which stayed at their original table and facilitated the dialogue and network construction. This stage was repeated until all delegates visited the various tables and made their contributions to the individual key word networks. In general, this activity was not mentioned much by delegates during the interview sessions. It is possible that because it was the first formal activity, it may not have been fresh in the minds of delegates. However, enquiring specifically about delegates’ experiences of the formal symposium activities generated some specific answers that conveyed either enjoyment, confusion or indifference.</p>	<p><i>Vignette 3: ‘Fun to see different conception/output’</i></p> <p>The world café activity was a fun teaching tool that I will try out at home with my students. I like the fact that no or minimal instructions were given and was amazed to see the different conceptions that were produced at each table. It also gave me a chance to talk to a lot of people, especially people from Europe. It provided me with different perspectives. It was an interesting networking activity to start off the symposium. Thinking back, I could have worked harder to find connections. I particularly liked the interdisciplinarity of it.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 4: ‘Pointless activity’</i></p> <p>I understand the ‘constructivist turn’, but for me this activity was pretty pointless. It was too open, there was no challenge. I like the idea of people interacting with each other, but it was – certainly for me, too repetitive, non-engaging, nothing that leads to anything, simply people chatting with each other. I can’t handle ‘let’s just talk’ activities. I am too busy for that. Just because we take part in this symposium, our work does not stop. We still have to answer emails and adhere to work deadlines.</p>

Table 4: Peer review feedback activity – Day 2

Activity	Description	Participant perception
Peer review feedback session: Providing critical but friendly feedback	The peer review procedure, prior to and also during the symposium event was regarded as highly valuable by delegates. This was one of the few process activities that attracted mainly positive remarks from participants.	<p><i>Vignette 5: 'Clear emphasis on learning from each other'</i></p> <p>This was probably my favourite activity. I liked the clear emphasis on learning from each other. It was very collegial and there was no imposing of ideas. Reviewing papers that are not in my discipline area has taken me out of my very specialised discipline area and also away from my geographical circle. Receiving feedback from an 'outsider's viewpoint' and having to engage with different perspectives is very constructive. I felt my work was judged on its merits. The willingness of participants to support each other is quite pleasing and something that I have not experienced before. I like the idea of reading for nuances and being able to give and receive new references. It made me think deeply about other people's work and the implications of their ideas for my own work.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 6: 'Feeling like an equal'</i></p> <p>At the beginning, I was a bit apprehensive to criticise the work of PhDs, being a student and part-time lecturer, but the relaxed atmosphere helped me greatly. The process was like good research supervision. It made me feel like an equal. Questions were asked and suggestions made, but not too many external frames were imposed. Getting detailed, thoughtful, considered and practical feedback on our chapter was most useful.</p>

This activity provided an intimate space to give and receive personalised feedback and to practice cross cultural and transdisciplinary communication, extending both the reviewers' and the authors' awareness of their own epistemological positions, culturally and professionally influenced pedagogical and research practices and writing styles. Most academics agree that a rigorous peer review process improves the quality of their work, but also that it can be a somewhat uncomfortable experience for authors (Bedeian, 2004; Tight, 2003). Casadevall and Fang (2009) note that there is a fine line between reviewer comments aimed at improving a research report and those comments aimed at censorship.

The effort spent in linguistic negotiations raises the questions of whether such effort is necessary and might even represent a subtle form of censorship. Reviewers should not try to rewrite papers to fit their own biases, ... excessive influence by reviewers can stifle legitimate scientific debate and encourage conformity (Casadevall & Fang, 2009, p. 1274).

The problems encountered by a few participants in this activity point out that personal sensitivities, such as the handicap felt by non-English speaking scholars (NESB) are at play. Besides the language barrier, complementary and divergent cultural and disciplinary discursive practices may add further complications to the peer reviewing activity. For example, expressing confusion, querying scholarly arguments or suggesting improvements are acceptable in Europe and Australia but can be perceived as problematic in other parts of the world, meaning that the act of peer criticism in this interdisciplinary, multicultural setting, may not have achieved the desired outcome. An extract from the observation notes taken during the event reads as follows.

This peer review process strategy, which is a commonly applied constructivist teaching and learning method, seems to be a source of positive emotion as participants exchange ideas, smile and laugh, focusing attentively on each other. However, some of the body language in certain groups conveys resistance, stress and/or annoyance. Viewing from afar, focusing on body language and expression, it seems that not each group is able to benefit equally from the cooperative peer review sessions. Do the designers need to invest more time in the protocol construction so that cultural sensitivities are accounted for and future participants are equipped with cultural and communication skills that would enable all feedback recipients to work in synchrony with their review partners? (Field notes, 29.11.2011).

Table 5: Double Tweeting activity – Day 2

Activity	Description	Participant perception
Double tweeting activity: Gaining clarity of own ideas	This third activity seemed to be the most memorable for many participants. It commenced with a request to synthesise the chapter so that it fits into a template with 280 characters. This was then followed by a face to face presentation of the 'tweet' to a partner in a line up. Presenters on one side of the line were directed to present their 'tweet' numerous times to a different audience as they progressed down the line. This activity, which was designed to help delegates distil their message and assist in the construction of an introduction chapter to the anthology, generated many positive and also some critical comments from participants.	<p><i>Vignette 7: 'Using only 280 characters exercises the mind!'</i></p> <p>This activity of expressing the essence of my chapter, using only 280 characters is very clever. It exercises the mind. I loved the tweeting so much that I will use it in my own group processes. It is a nice concept and the clear structure and template helped to get the tweet easily on the sheet of paper to share.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 8: 'Tweeting was hard'</i></p> <p>Tweeting is harder than I thought it would be. It forced me to think in a different manner and I had to start again after failing. I was really challenged doing the tweet. I'm not good with forms, but it was useful gaining insight into other people's work. After the initial unsuccessful attempt, I got it. I found that the tweeting was really valuable to get the essence of my paper, but it did not help me understand other people's work.</p>

The activity described in Table 5 was designed to challenge chapter authors to become more thoughtful about their key message. The strategy used to arrive at this goal was to create a new writing situation that borrowed from the conventions of a Web 2.0 discourse (Dobozy, 2010). In the activity, participants were required to engage in the relationship of writing, presenting, receiving and responding to distilled key messages about the author's chapter. Authors needed to be able to view this pedagogical activity as a carefully constructed recursive process in refined thinking. As will be discussed below, this pedagogical activity is illustrative of the need to make the professional learning outcomes and processes of the double tweeting activity more overt to participants, so that chapter authors are able to engage more deeply with the carefully crafted design. An extract from the observation notes pertaining to this activity read as follows.

It is not obvious to everyone that the repetitiveness of the activity was a deliberate design element. Filtering out and refining a key message takes time and many unsuccessful attempts. Being able to present a 'short and sharp' message in a rapid succession is an interesting pedagogical strategy that has potentially many applications. To gauge a variety of reactions allowed authors to challenge one another in the quest to enhance the quality of the anthology (Field notes, 29.11.2011).

Table 6: Networking activities – Days 3 and 4

Activity	Description	Participant perception
Networking activities: How does my chapter connect to your chapter?	The networking activities are a central feature of the LiHE symposium model and are designed to provide a space for delegates to collaborate with each other to arrive at a commonly agreed form to represent the interconnectedness of the chapters and to agree on a particular structure and chapter order. As in earlier accounts of this process by Nygaard and Holtham (2008, p. 332), it appeared that this formal activity constituted 'the most heated of all the discussions', which was perceived by some as creative and enjoyable but stressful and frustrating by others.	<p><i>Vignette 9: 'The loose coupling of chapters'</i></p> <p>The loose coupling of the small set of elements, which through persistence and creativity produce a coherence and order is terrific. It was quite impressive to see how we developed our own pattern and arrived at the two working groups. The power was definitely with the authors, not the editors. We were not forced to cooperate, but we did it anyway.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 10: 'The structured sharing of ideas'</i></p> <p>I liked the structured sharing of ideas. It helped engage with each other's chapters and make links. I enjoyed seeing people work with each other on a different level, but I'm not sure if it does anything for our text. People with strength take control of the problem. Still, to achieve the objective in such a collegial way and the preparedness of people to give and take was a very enjoyable experience.</p>
		<p><i>Vignette 11: 'It's hard to be reasonable'</i></p> <p>I felt it was hard to be reasonable when I found out that some people had no clue what my chapter was about. It felt anonymous even when working closely together. Things got heated, which made me feel uncomfortable. I honestly considered walking out. I was frustrated and angry.</p>

		<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Vignette 12: 'Isn't this the editor's job?'</i></p> <p>The linking the paper activity is a good idea, but a difficult task, taking up too much time. The use of time should be more effective. For this activity to work, it would require that people read more of the other people's work. But then, isn't this the editor's job? Really, this activity is very creative – very avant-garde, but is it necessary? It may be innovative to try to do things in a modern and colourful way, but it felt a bit like “look how innovative I am”. Deciding what chapter goes where – who cares?</p>
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The connection between cognition, emotion and action is well established (Izard, 2010). The role of emotion in communication between members of a community of practice has been found to be one of the most important characteristics of productive collaborative action (Evers, Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, *et al*, 2005). As participants delved into the creative process of finding a suitable structure in which to order the chapters of the anthology, there was much deliberation and negotiation. As the activity progressed, some participants got more passionate whereas others seemed to withdraw from the creative collaborative process. The above vignettes (V 9-12) illustrate the emotionally charged atmosphere during this activity. Moreover, they portray the emotionally driven motivation of participants to stay cognitively and socially connected to the activity and each other or withdraw from the process. Hence, emotion is integrally linked to decision making processes and resulting action. The importance of emotion regulation in learning situations that demand cooperation and collaborative problem solving has long been recognised in the education literature (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). The perception of ‘messiness’ discussed above may be the source of participants’ emotional and cognitive responses and resulting resistance and/or withdrawal from the process. Furthermore, it seems to also be linked to the professional identity of academics and the traditional role conceptions of chapter authors and editors of edited academic texts. An extract of observation notes pertaining to this activity highlights a possible design flaw of this activity:

The facilitators clearly aimed to be non-directive and employed a *laissez faire* approach during this activity. Intensely observing participants’ behaviour (action, body language and facial expression) during this activity, it seems that the displayed ignorance of some participants regarding the content of other chapters is a great source of disappointment and annoyance for others. There are a number of delegates who seem confident and greatly knowledgeable about much of the work of others. Based on the emotion displayed, the delegates can easily be placed into two groups: participants displaying approach emotions (signalling passionate engagement) and participants displaying withdrawal emotions (signalling disinterest, disengagement). Letting the authors experience collaborative decision making and take ownership of the anthology structure production may work when everyone is equally engaged and knowledgeable. What is apparent here is too much uninformed decision making. Too many

delegates seem uncomfortable, minimally engaged or not knowledgeable enough to make a meaningful contribution, leaving a few to take the leadership and make decision. Will this harm the quality of the anthology? (Field notes, 30.11.2011).

## Discussion

This model of professional development presents a departure from traditional one way presentation modes of the past that generally encourage passivity on the part of the audience. Participating in the LiHE symposium demands genuine interest others' work and a willingness to collaborate in the assessment of assumptions and expectations which support deeply held beliefs and values, giving rise to emotional reactions (Wang & King, 2006) and enabling joint knowledge creation. The constructivist nature of the symposium requires a certain mindset of participants, one which is open and receptive to alternative viewpoints and a tolerance for 'Otherness' (Staszak, 2008). The tension between the role expectations of delegates in traditional versus progressive professional development designs is clearly visible in this case study of LiHE Australia participants. The idiosyncratic experiences voiced during interview sessions with participants were often corroborated by field notes taken about observable behaviours of delegates during individual activities. The design of the LiHE professional development event demands of participants deep engagement with the work of others, which can be cognitively and emotionally challenging or even outright unpleasant. This study provided a snapshot of cognitive struggles for understanding and meaning making of the non-familiar processes and the emotional demands placed on participants, who are often quite deliberately taken 'out of their comfort zone' (Field notes 30.11.2011) in an attempt to break free from the professional development experiences of classical conference structures. The demanding nature of this new model of professional development, but also the joys of success, is clearly reflected in the participant accounts in the vignettes.

For the majority of LiHE Australia symposium participants this was a new conference experience. Although all of participants identified themselves as being constructivist educators 'at least in principle', the explicit demand to be an active and engaged participant was not an easy requirement to fulfil. For many, this experience, as illustrated through the vignettes, opened up new ways of thinking and doing (Brew, 2006), requiring mental agility, tenacity and open mindedness, not usually demanded during classical conference participation. However, as some of the more critical vignettes (V 1, 4, 11 and 12) illustrate, this concept can be difficult to grasp and even more difficult to enact, even by university educators who identify themselves as being 'moderately or deeply constructivist'.

Engagement with fellow LiHE symposium participants and their work opened up the possibility for younger university educators (V6) to develop an identity as an academic, whose work is valued and embedded in a larger, significant project. The vignettes and observation notes illustrate how this non-traditional conference design was experienced quite differently by delegates. It seems that the experience is highly depended on educators' pedagogical epistemology. In other words, the academic and social context of

the LiHE symposium model, as exemplified by LiHE Australia, the sixth such symposium, may differ too much from the classical conference model for some participants. It may, in fact, demand too much of an 'out of comfort zone' behaviour for participants who declared themselves to be 'moderately constructivist'. This may be caused in part by the unfamiliarity with aspects of the design of the professional development experience, but also by the dissimilarity of epistemological viewpoints and educational paradigms. In either case, it is important to recognise that the creation of transformative learning opportunities for university educators during the LiHE symposium, which fosters new dynamics and is intended to be empowering, may well have been felt to be disempowering by some participants (V 1, 11,12).

Approach emotions provide intrinsic motivation to stay connected to an event and peers in a problem solving process, whereas withdrawal emotions are a coping strategy evoking a desire to withdraw from the event and disconnect socially and cognitively from peers (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Rogat & Koskey, 2011). The emotional engagement of participants during the course of a novel professional development event, such as future LiHE symposia needs to be monitored. Equally, organisers' expectations during the symposium need to be communicated more clearly to participants. It may be valuable to explore the idea of a social contract for participants, requesting future delegates to sign a 'participation pledge'. Another alternative could be an explicit negotiation dialogue at the start of the symposium when organisers explain what they intend and the processes they plan to use and have participants offer their own facilitation strategies or even have the opportunity to facilitate some sessions. Discussions with delegates revealed that some LiHE Australia participants were motivated by utilitarian goals (getting a quick and easy publication) and were therefore only marginally prepared for and interested in engaging with the transformative professional learning opportunities described in this study (Field notes, 30.11.2011).

### **Limitations of the study**

The decision to document and evaluate the LiHE professional development model as a participant researcher is an important first step, but there are a number of limitations of this study. As outlined above, no generalisations can be made from any case study research project, which also applies to the findings of this study. However, it has opened up avenues for constructive dialogue about the value of new and innovative professional development models for university educators and the design of further research projects. Some of the methodological limitations of the study pertain particularly to the sample size and it would be beneficial to replicate this study with more participants. A longitudinal study approach comparing data from multiple case studies would be of particular benefit, capturing participant views concerning the uniqueness of the LiHE professional development model and its short term and long term effects. Hence it is strongly recommended that this study is replicated in different settings and with different participants, documenting similarities and differences of individual and collective participant experiences over time. A particular area of interest and need is the investigation of the potential reciprocal influence between constructivist educational practices during the professional development days (symposium) and actual change of

teaching practices of participating university educators. With further analysis of these dynamic processes an understanding can be gained of the immersion effect of constructivist teaching and learning experiences gained during the symposium.

## Conclusion and implications

This research report presented the case of LiHE Australia. This study of a new professional development model, first implemented in 2008, documented designer intent and participants' idiosyncratic experiences. It explored the possibilities and obstacles of new forms of professional development practices of university educators. Although conference attendance is one of the primary forms of professional development for university educators, their classical transmission mode of information dissemination and networking is being recognised as misaligned with constructivist teaching and learning principles and practices.

The LiHE symposium model exemplifies the shift away from traditional transmission education to a transformative learning centred approach to professional development, characterised by different information sharing activities and types of participant engagement within the LiHE symposium program. The study was able to draw out emerging points of intersection between the general symposium design intent and the reported lived experiences of participants. Some divergence of views of the symposium experience was to be expected. However, the wide variety of views expressed may be less a judgement on the actual design of the professional learning experience and just as much a reflection of the epistemological misalignment between designers and participants. This is a rather unexpected finding. It implies an unmet demand for further formalised evaluations of various professional development models for university educators. More importantly, new professional learning models, such as the LiHE symposia, provide university educators with choice and a variety of ways to engage in professional learning. As these alternative models mature and become more widely known, they may be specifically targeted by university educators seeking deeply constructivist professional development experiences to complement their traditional conference participation.

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