

Connecting with HE teaching staff about learning design ideas

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JISC 22 Jan 08 v.2

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Learning design, not curriculum not resources

Teachers have 3 roles:

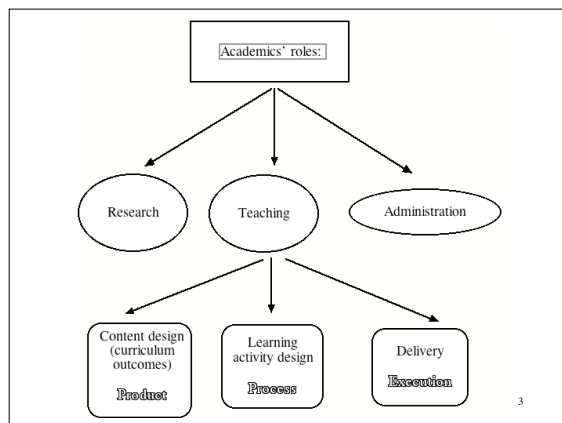
- Curriculum design / content selection
- Learning activity design (learning design)
- Delivery e.g. facilitating a tutorial, passing on a text

This is about learning design: the one which some say has the big effects on learning outcomes.

It is not about resources, transmission, static repositories.

It is about conversation (designers & teachers); dynamic adaptation.

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1. Disseminating teaching is NOT like disseminating research

For research, the work is worthless unless disseminated.
For research, careers depend on publishing: supply enforced
For research, this depends on citing/reading others' papers: demand enforced.

For teaching, the work's value depends on delivery to learners, not colleagues.
For teaching, no reward for writing it up
For teaching, no requirement to read others' papers on it.

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2. Academic life is wholly organised around disciplines. This fully applies to teaching.

Even if there are any general educational ideas that apply to all disciplines, they need to be translated into terminology and concrete examples for each discipline separately.

This is why papers in the educational literature have almost no impact on (disciplinary) practitioners. (Even if they read them, they wouldn't understand the jargon.)

We have repeatedly seen audience members turn off when we haven't provided an example or case in their subject.

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3. Bridging from theory to practice is itself a whole enterprise

Rule of thumb in science is that you have to spend the same again on "development" as you spent on the "research" that provided the first laboratory demonstration.

In learning design, design principles like Nicol's are an important and potentially effective step in the middle ground: brief enough to draw readers in, oriented to action not explanation.

E.g.: <http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/principles.html>

In reality a 1-line principle plus 60 seconds oral explanation ...

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4. Provide a one-stop shop

(experience with my EVS website suggests ...):

Even more than with all documents, you have to convince a reader:

- In the title that they want to look at the page
- In the first sentence that they want to read the paragraph
- In the opening paragraph that the rest of the page is worth checking out

The principles are:

1. Try to provide a one-stop shop for everything they want, not the one thing you feel you want to contribute.
2. Provide multiple levels of (drill down) detail
(not one "right" level)

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5. Practitioners need a medley of information types

The medley includes:

- Pedagogical principles (many teachers like to see these)
- Example cases (applying at least to arts and science separately)
- Empirical evidence of learning gains
- Practitioner testimonials that it worked OK in practice.
- Practical how-to tips,
- Where to get the equipment
- ...
- Like business, teaching is about whatever it takes: money and how to get a room as much as pedagogy

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6. Cost, quantity, quality triangle

One reason why the medley is important is that implementing a learning design is a practical matter involving time and other resources, not just interesting pedagogy. Often the only benefit of new technology is that it does a job cheaper and faster than teachers could do it before. But that can be traded in for more quality



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“How do we develop the skills and support for staff to engage with design for learning?”

This seems to presuppose that staff lack skills and support for doing course design.

- This is arrogant: designer-centrism
- There is no evidence of learning outcomes improving after any such intervention
- Course design continues now, as it always has, without it
- It ignores the real nature of the possible interaction: between some general ideas about learning designs, and a teacher's detailed grasp of their context.
- (We have to apply constructivism to this exchange even more than to teaching students.)

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Summary of Practical suggestions

- Put it on the web, where Google will find it for them when and only when they need it. Just in time dissemination.
- Organise the material for a web audience (not a tome-reading audience) I.e. in a pyramid of levels of detail.
- Collect all the different required kinds of information in one place
- Have examples in as many disciplines as possible (and expressed in the terminology of those disciplines too)
- Have ideas organised and expressed for practical action, not theoretical explanation and taxonomising
- Do not assume the reader is ignorant and that you have the knowledge. You don't.

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The Breslin question:

What challenges and solutions exist around student created content and student owned technologies to support self directed learner use of learning resources?

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The answer: nothing new here

The question is tacitly teacher-centered. To get a better perspective, first remember how little teachers are involved currently. Our honours students have perhaps 2 contact hours a day:

- I.e. 3/4 of their time is self-directed and unknown to their teachers.
- Even in lectures, we know nothing of the notes they take (or blogs, or ...)
- Teaching activities require skills on both sides, and learning depends on the quality of these skills.
- What the teacher does is only a small part of the process.

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... more

A naïve theory is that teachers determine the design / learning actions and activities. (T-centric, designer-centric)

In reality, every activity can be organised by either teacher or learner: there is a dimension of learner proactiveness

Even more interesting is to consider such study management skills as governed by a feedback loop.

What are the occasions that prompt students to improve these skills?

What are we (designers, teachers) doing as second order actions to support and promote this? Scaffold this?

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