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LEARNING DESIGN: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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Introduction

This chapter explores some implications of the concepts discussed in the book *Learning Design: Conceptualizing a Framework for Teaching and Learning Online*. For those in teaching roles, it encourages greater reuse and adoption of Learning Design, and a shift from focussing primarily on learning content towards learning activities. For those in educational leadership, it stresses the importance of appropriate rewards and recognition for educators who adopt learning designs, and the importance of fostering and supporting sharing and reuse at an institutional level. For those in educational research, it notes the benefits of using Learning Design to conduct more fine-grained comparisons in educational investigations, and the potential benefits of a learning design for Instructional Design. It concludes with the need for Learning Design theory to keep trying to develop a broadly accepted representational framework(s).

Overview

This book has provided a new synthesis of foundational concepts for Learning Design (LD-F, LD-CM and LD-P), followed by a range of chapters that explore the theoretical and practical implications of these concepts. In this final chapter, we briefly consider some of the implications of these ideas for our educational colleagues—those in teaching, those in leadership and those in research. We then conclude with reflections on next steps for the field of Learning Design itself.

Implications for Teaching

Our initial reflections are relevant to those who have a role in teaching, whether they are university lecturers, schoolteachers or trainers in vocational and corporate settings. We would encourage our teaching colleagues to investigate the reuse of existing educational resources. Many educators re-invent the wheel when preparing resources and activities for teaching—often without investigating whether someone else may have done similar work and shared it for others to use.

Educators are familiar with reusing educational resources created by others in the form of the textbook, but there are so many other kinds of resources (often freely available online) they could use to improve educational quality and reduce preparation workload—particularly the types of learning designs discussed in this book. Examples of collections of learning designs include:

- AUTC Learning Design project (www.learningdesigns.uow.edu.au/),
- LAMS Community (www.lamscommunity.org/),
- Cloudworks (http://cloudworks.ac.uk/),
- Project Enrole (http://enrole.uow.edu.au/) and others.

While all of these initiatives are relatively small, they are pointers to a future where learning designs are widely shared and reused.

If the field of Learning Design is to transform education globally, then one of the shifts needed is a change of mind-set among educators from creating all resources themselves, to starting to investigate whether pre-existing resources could be used or adapted for local use. This switch in educators' minds from "default self-creation" to "default searching for existing resources" may yet be the most important change needed for broad transformation.

Just as searching and reuse are important, so too is sharing. While some educators are willing to share widely, others have concerns that inhibit their sharing. The use of appropriate copyright approaches for sharing and reuse, such as the Creative Commons licences, can help remove certain concerns. For some educators, it is the thought of sharing with people they don't know (who might potentially criticize their contributions) that inhibits them (Masterman & Wild, 2011). Where broad sharing isn't acceptable, a practical approach to this concern is to encourage limited sharing among a smaller group (across a university, or a school or group of schools), with the hope that following an initial positive experience of sharing, there will be greater willingness to consider wider sharing in the future. Furthermore, sharing between educators should not stop at formal educators themselves. The important shift towards involving students as partners in the learning process means that students can be used as educational researchers; they may explore others' designs and propose more appropriate designs for their

post-digital education which are agreed and implemented through staff-student partnerships; these are then re-shared through new networks (for an example, see www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/change-agents-network).

Another implication for educators is the growing importance of learning activities, not just learning content. Educators no longer live in an age of "information scarcity", where it was difficult to acquire knowledge from hard-to-access books or lecturers. Rather, the Internet provides people with "anytime, anywhere" access to rich and multifaceted resources, which means that information scarcity is itself scarce in an age of knowledge abundance (Honan, 2015), and yet many classroom experiences still focus primarily on content transmission when content is no longer scarce.

The "flipped classroom" is just one example of a growing shift towards using the classroom (or live online) experiences for activities that foster learning, frequently through collaborative interactions. This is possible because basic content knowledge can often be obtained via reading a textbook or watching an online video—neither of which require classroom time. We are not suggesting that classroom time should abandon knowledge acquisition, but educators should at least investigate the productive use of modern technologies so that classroom time is most effective in fostering learning, coupled with other useful learning activities, such as online activities before and after a face-to-face class. In many cases, the kind of learning designs discussed in this book can be central to the shift from a content focus to an activity focus. And the rise of mobile devices and "blended learning" approaches demonstrates how technology can be a useful part of the classroom experience, not just something for before and after class.

Implications for Educational Leaders

Perhaps the greatest challenge to educators adopting a reuse approach is the lack of incentives to do so—and this is something that educational leaders can address. Institutions could establish institutionally relevant (and endorsed) learning design collections, templates and tools for educators or course teams to follow, and this could both save time and improve educational quality. Facilitation of reuse of quality educational material should be an institutional concern and no longer seen as the responsibility of a few early adopters of innovative educational practices. Scale up requires an institutionally supported response, which means recognition and reward for reuse and open sharing of quality educational resources and practices (Armellini & Nie, 2013).

Course design based around reuse, such as now happens with the emergence of MOOCs (massive open online courses) can be complemented by ensuring that reuse practices are written into job descriptions for academics, teachers, trainers and teaching-related support staff. Performance reviews/appraisals then provide a direct line of sight from job descriptions to actual sharing and reuse practice plus recognition and reward of exemplary practice.

There are few examples to date of formal reward and recognition to encourage change in mainstream sharing and reuse practice. In 2010/2011 Leeds Metropolitan University introduced recognition of Open Educational Resource (OER) use and release as an optional measure within annual academic performance review (Thomson, 2010). That model may be adopted elsewhere, but meanwhile active engagement with reuse is, unless project-funded, commonly left to the discretion of the individual.

In universities, academics are rewarded for sharing and reconfiguring their *research* work in a format that assists in research dissemination (e.g. journal publication). But there is no widespread equivalent process to reward educators for undertaking extra activity to prepare their educational resources for wider dissemination and reuse. This is a key area where educational leaders can provide recognition and reward for something that many educators would like to do (if given support).

Another step that educational leaders can take to help transform reuse and sharing is through establishing central teaching support positions or groups. Many schools and universities have centrally supported positions to assist educators—these positions could be given a much greater focus on encouraging reuse and the adoption of learning designs. For example, colleagues in university educational development centres, as part of the services they already provide for sharing good teaching practice, could provide targeted support to improve uptake of learning designs.

Implications for Education Research

Two particular areas where Learning Design could assist educational research are in structuring experimental comparisons, and in broadening the focus of Instructional Design theory. In terms of experimental comparisons—many educational research investigations operate at a fairly coarse level of detail about student experiences—that is, comparisons are made on whole programs of study, or institutional or national differences. While there is a place for these kinds of research, the field of Learning Design could assist with more detailed "granular" research by providing tools to structure and analyze individual components of the teaching process—that is, "which teacher and student activities were occurring when?"—in a way that would allow for much more fine-grained comparison of educational interventions.

While this approach could be used to better analyze education where no technology was used, it would have its greatest impact where learning design software systems have been used to implement an educational intervention because these systems have the potential to record much greater detail about the activities of each individual student at each step in the learning process. Where this data can be collected, it provides a rich starting point for Learning

Analytics—one of the promising new areas of educational research. Learning Design student data may yet prove a treasure trove for Learning Analytics (Dobozy, 2015).

The second area where Learning Design could assist educational research (and theory) is in the field of Instructional Design. While a full exploration of this topic goes beyond the scope of the current discussion, it is worth noting that some versions of Instructional Design theory and practice have been strong on structured learning processes, but weak (or silent) on the role of collaborative learning. By comparison, Learning Design has always had a strong collaborative learning focus, but it has also incorporated the benefits of structured processes for learning (whether they be linear, branched, cyclical or other). Further, the work conducted jointly between teacher-designers and instructional designers (as occurs particularly in higher education) offers a point of intersection where the theories and practices of both might be fruitfully explored.

Too often there has been an unbridgeable divide between Instructional Design theory on one hand, and constructivist theory on the other (see for example Gibbons, 2014). While important theoretical disagreements remain to be considered between these approaches, there are possibilities for Learning Design to act as a bridge between these two areas. Further research and implementation will be needed to investigate how Learning Design and Instructional Design might usefully interact (Dalziel, 2013).

Next Steps for Learning Design

Learning Design is already a rich field of research and practice as this book illustrates. Nonetheless, a number of key challenges await for the future if Learning Design is to reach its full potential. Many of these are practical challenges related to human behaviour and rewards, sometimes coupled with society-wide changes (such as changing attitudes to sharing and developing partnerships with students). Some of these have been considered earlier in this volume, and some relate to the slow changes that occur with any major innovation.

However, one central challenge for Learning Design theory deserves highlighting at the end of this book—the need to develop a more widely used language or framework (or languages or frameworks) for sharing learning designs. As the first chapter notes, there has been progress on this challenge in the past decade, particularly with visualizations of teaching and learning processes. But there is further to go with this idea and its implementation, and the field would benefit from ongoing innovation in representational approaches until education develops something like modern music notation—not just in its representational effectiveness, but more importantly in its breadth of adoption.

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