

Introducing new Learning Designs: Variations across the Higher Education Disciplines

Aim:

The aim of this study is to facilitate the use of good quality learning designs across the higher education sector by identifying those with inter-disciplinary potential. In this way, effective learning designs can be used to introduce different teaching and learning approaches to different disciplines/subjects. Effective learning designs promote student engagement, productive learning and optimise student retention (Scott, 2005).

Rationale:

If an effective learning design can be successfully transferred across into another discipline/subject, then good teaching and learning could be shared. The introduction of different teaching and learning approaches to different disciplines/subjects will facilitate the promotion of quality teaching and learning throughout the higher education sector.

The project will also have significance for the growing number of teacher resource repositories. With specific data relating to discipline/subject transfer potential, repository managers will be able to better direct attempts to adopt, adapt and reuse their teacher resources.

Learning Design:

The field of Learning Design studies the creation of student learning experiences. It examines:

- What support people need in order to learn;
- How the results of a learning process can be assessed and communicated; and
- How learning and support can be made as effective, efficient, attractive and accessible as possible for everyone involved in the process (Koper & Tattersall, 2005).

When methods of instruction and their contexts are identified, this “design knowledge” can be used to create new learning experiences that are more likely to achieve success than ad hoc or random design decisions (Reigeluth, 1999).

A “learning design” is the application of this “learning design knowledge” into the development of a defined learning experience (Koper & Tattersall, 2005). It has been proposed that generic learning designs could serve as pedagogical frameworks to support academic staff in creating new learning experiences, whereby the lecturer adapts an existing learning design, specifies the learning activities, and chooses or creates the resources and supports needed to suit his/her students (Bennett, 2004).

The proposed project will test how well learning designs transfer across the higher education sector, that is, between disciplines/subjects. It will examine whether a learning design that works effectively in one discipline/subject, can have its content changed and be successfully implemented in another discipline/subject. This evaluation will also investigate if lecturers need to be provided with additional guidance to successfully deliver them. That is, to successfully implement a new learning design, did the lecturers also need to be supported with pedagogical information about the way their subject content in

this learning design can come to be understood, the ways it can be misunderstood, what counts as understanding in this context and what they need to know about how students will experience the subject via the learning design.

Research questions:

1. Are some learning designs more suited to one specific discipline/ subject than others? If so, what pedagogical issues emerge?
2. Does the epistemological development of the learning design influence its success in any particular discipline/subject? That is, are there variations in learning designs between subjects because there are fundamental differences in the disciplines/subjects or, is this as a result of how learning approaches have been embedded over time?
3. Can generic learning designs be used to introduce different teaching and learning approaches to different disciplines (Cook, 2006)?

Background:

Currently, there are significant differences in learning outcomes, activities, teaching methods and assessment across the disciplines/subjects. These have an effect on student engagement, learning and retention (Scott, 2005). Generally, disciplines/subjects with higher student interaction and feedback are associated with higher student satisfaction ratings (Cook, 2006; Franklin & Theall, 1992; Scott, 2005). It is proposed that sharing learning designs across disciplines/subjects is one way to introduce different teaching and learning approaches that address this issue. This proposition assumes that not all learning designs are discipline/subject specific and there is evidence that certain learning activities occur more frequently in some disciplines/subjects than others. This project will determine whether there are pedagogical reasons for this, or whether some activities have just become embedded over time.

Approach:

Once a collection of effective learning designs has been identified in a variety of disciplines/subjects drawn from a number of universities, the following will be undertaken:

- Results across the disciplines/subjects will be compared and what pedagogical differences exist between the disciplines/subjects determined.
- Previously untried learning designs will be transferred into a variety of new disciplines/subject areas. Although the study cannot comprehensively cover the full gamut of disciplines/subjects, a representative range will be utilised.
- The success of the new learning design implementations will be measured via lecturer (learning design presenter) and student (user) interviews/surveys.

Further information will be uploaded to this website as results come in. The researchers are happy to answer any questions you may have via email on the addresses below:

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