

EDITORIAL

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The influence of theory and student feedback on learning design

The papers in this issue put paid to the simplistic objective binary that teachers teach and students learn. The complex reality is that teachers design and scaffold student learning experiences based on theoretical constructs and discipline standards but fit these into specific contexts. Xia (*this issue*) concisely explains that “goals are set in order to reach a specific performance outcome” and that “learning outcomes can be defined in general as acting as a benchmark for ensuring teaching quality” (p. 25). But, from this point, the complexity begins. Learning experiences designed to meet goals and outcomes are then customised to meet particular student needs and contexts and, in turn, modified for logistical reasons such as timing or access to human and physical resources.

The main reason for modification, however, is clearly from student feedback. This feedback, in turn, is substantively drawn from students’ affective responses or their inherent goals and capacities. These might include: prior experience, background, personality, academic background, interests, cognitive ability, quality of teaching, and student expectations (Xia, *this issue*). This situation is also suffused with (and perhaps subverted by) academic and personal goals and outcomes to be achieved.

The seven papers in this issue of the *Journal of Learning Design* can be organised into three broad themes relating to how theory and student feedback can and does influence learning design.

- The first theme, reflected in the first and second papers of the issue, is concerned with the experience of students when involved in the distinct and deliberate adoption of learning designs.
- The second theme, encompassing the third and fourth papers, is concerned with student motivation, affective goals and learning outcomes. The authors of these papers have approached their study in quite distinct ways and each is set in a different discipline context.
- The third and final theme, encompassing the final three papers in this issue, is concerned with learning design in more global ways. Each provides an overview of learning and teaching in higher education and each has a resonance with the first two themes of this issue.

This issue

Theme 1 – Papers 1 and 2

The first paper in this issue, by **Coyne, Lee, and Petrova** from The University of Edinburgh, shares the experience of a flipped classroom in a design studio. The authors take an honest, pragmatic and reflective perspective on their teaching and the varying reactions of their students. The paper first tracks the idea of the “flipped classroom” back to the seminal ideas of deconstruction from the 1980s. The authors then consider large groups of students and their experiences over a few years of learning in a flipped classroom which made use of distributed digital media. The authors conclude that being in a flipped classroom is an “initially alien” experience and one that calls for further attention and refinement (Coyne et al., *this issue*, p. 12).

The second paper, by **Lelis** from the University of West London, similarly considers the experience and perceptions of students. In this instance, the learning design adopted by the author/researcher is reciprocal peer learning. Student as acted as both tutor and tutee in one module of a one year MA course. As with the first paper in this issue, the author has purposefully adopted a learning design, here reciprocal peer learning, to better meet the needs of her students.

Theme 2 – Papers 3 and 4

Third, the paper by **Xia** from Aalto University, Finland, is based in the context of Computer Science and considers learning goals in higher education and the goals that students set for themselves (and the factors which impact on them). The author concludes that learning goals in higher education are multi-faceted and context-dependent and that students' goals are affected by prior knowledge on the subject, family background, expectation and motivation towards the subject being studied.

The fourth paper in this issue offers a systematic study on the development of design expertise by students in architecture degrees in Nigeria. The authors, **Oluwatayo, Ezema and Opoko** from the Covenant University, Nigeria, respond to questions concerning what constitutes design ability and expertise in architects and the categories and factors surrounding these. This paper, based on data drawn from a survey of under- and post-graduate students, concludes that expertise is founded in passion and proficiency. The authors have provided two documents (as supplementary files) to support the argument in their paper. These respectively describe: (i) the results of a cluster analysis and (ii) the factors of task, environmental and individual characteristics.

Theme 3 – Papers 5, 6 and 7

Fifth, **Burton** from the University of the Sunshine Coast (Australia), considers learning outcomes in the discipline of Law. It looks at Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) and suggests ways to operationalise the TLO of “thinking skills” through a legal reasoning grid and targeted assessment rubrics. It represents an instance where learning and assessment is scaffolded through benchmarking against discipline standards.

The sixth paper, by **Cameron** from Southern Cross University, Australia, is an overview of learning designs, teaching methods and activities in Australian universities and how these differ by discipline. The author concludes that, despite their being a broad range of teaching approaches being used, there “remains a bias toward the traditional discipline stereotypes, especially in assessment” (Cameron, *this issue*, p. 81).

The seventh and final paper in this issue, by **Göksu, Özcan, Çakir and Göktaş**, is similarly an overview of practice. In this instance, it is a content analysis of research trends in instructional design models covering the period from 1999 to 2014. It provides an interesting snapshot of the whole field of learning design and summarises the models and the variables each examines. The authors have provided three supplementary files to complement the discussion in the paper and to provide additional data: (i) other instructional design models used in the papers; (ii) distribution of other journals in which studies were carried out; and (iii) an instructional design model classification form.

What further connects the papers (and the themes) in this issue is that each asks (and responds to) questions relating to learning and teaching in higher education. Specifically, these articles cumulatively enact much of what is addressed in the Larnaca Declaration on Learning Design (Dalziel, et al., 2016) in response to four open questions concerning effective teaching and learning in the classroom. These questions are:

- How can educators become more effective in their preparation and facilitation of teaching and learning activities?

- How can educators be exposed to new teaching ideas that take them beyond their traditional approaches?
- How can technology assist educators without undermining them?
- How can learners be better prepared for the world that awaits them?

None of the authors whose work is shared in this issue are not content with taking learning and teaching for granted; neither do they belong to Biggs' (2003) assertion that "good teachers in a university are often simply 'gifted amateurs'" (Cameron, *this issue*, p. 80).

We would like to sincerely thank the authors in this issue for their genuine and diligent response to review as well as for the dedication to their teaching that provided the initial impetus to develop their papers. Further, this journal is grateful to the constancy and care of its reviewers who find time and energy in busy lives to provide constructive advice to others and, in so doing, help us all to better understand the complexity of learning and teaching. As in previous issues, we commend these papers to you and hope that you not only enjoy reading them, but that the ideas and recommendations find resonance within your own practice.

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References

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