



EDITORIAL

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Macro to micro Learning Design: From coarse/course to fine grain student interactions

This issue presents six papers from a wide range of disciplines and locations again reminding us of the rich tapestry of teaching and learning in higher education around the world. The papers in this issue fit loosely into three categories that move from the *macro* in considering whole curriculum or course design, through to finer levels of evaluating teaching and learning materials, to end with the *micro* decisions made in the selection of teaching methods or technologies to support those methods.

What is common to all papers in this issue is their tacit acknowledgement of the complexity of teaching and learning and an expression of the authors' profound interest in analysing and reifying its design. Where they differ is in their use of terminology, particularly in what constitutes a unit, course, or program. It is rather a case, to paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, where we are "separated by a common language." Similarly, these papers provide differing perspectives of what are alternately called graduate attributes, competences, competencies or capabilities. Firstly as formal statements of learning outcomes in Readman's paper and secondly less formally, but with similar intent, in the paper by Bundsgaard and Hansen. Further, Bahr and Lloyd see graduate capabilities as one of several parameters influencing course design.

The Macro level

We begin this issue with three papers addressing the macro view of course design and evaluation. The first paper in this issue and the first at this level of overall course design, by Keshavarz, from Iran, addresses the measurement of learning outcomes through a quantitative tool. Here 'course' and 'program' are used interchangeably. The author contends that course learning outcomes can be used in both design and evaluation, here in terms of course accreditation.

The second paper, by Readman, takes an original look at leading learning design at the beginning of a curriculum renewal process. The author has looked to graduate attributes as the means of designing a curriculum through a shared philosophy, or set of understandings about teaching and learning. Here the term 'program' is used to define a degree and the means to design it is the same as the means to evaluate it. What matters is how program leaders understand and interpret the gr

In the third paper in this issue, Bahr and Lloyd, the co-editors of this journal, address the complex and elusive issue of course cohesion and have attempted to identify the key elements needed to achieve this. Keeping a course – what Readman called a program - as designed is, for them, a critical way to ensure better learning outcomes for students and a means to make curriculum renewal sustainable. Their paper was derived from a frustration and fatigue arising from a continual and somewhat erratic cycle of curriculum decay and renewal.

All three papers have worked towards understandings which can be applied equally to where a course begins, to its ongoing review and, lastly, to its evaluation. The key message here is that courses or programs need to be held together, on a macro level - by a shared philosophy or underlying goals. That process begins, and ends, with effective and informed design.

The Middle level

The second level considers how we might best evaluate the teaching and learning materials used to achieve course or program goals. This is distinct from but complementary to macro level issues of design, and similarly to the micro level which follows. If course components, such as resources, are not sympathetic to broader goals, then a course is eroded from the inside.

The single paper in this section, the fourth in this issue, is by Bundsgaard and Hansen, from Denmark. The authors here provide a holistic framework for evaluating learning materials and designs for learning. Similar to Keshavarz's motivation for consistency, this paper is derived from the authors' need to move the evaluation of learning materials from an informed but subjective stance to one that allowed consistency of judgements. The argument moves systematically through two interdependent concepts: learning materials and design for learning as the authors propose differing learning potentials – potential, actualized, and actual. The complexity of arguments and the breadth of theory presented in this paper are testament to the complexity of teaching and learning itself and the differing perspectives that different observers and researchers bring to the problem.

The Micro Level

The third level, the micro, considers the real world of the classroom and speaks to processes that complement the ideas in the previous papers. The daily interactions between lecturers and students represent the enactment of the macro and middle level decisions and directions. Although concerned with the micro decisions made by lecturers and also by students, what the papers at the micro level share with other papers in this issue is their abiding concern for broader discipline goals.

The fifth paper in this issue, by Ruyters, Douglas and Law is concerned with the decisions lecturers make about teaching strategies and the ways that technologies such as wikis and blogs may support those decisions.

The sixth and final paper in this issue, by Roberts and Nason, in their review of student self-censorship in a collaborative knowledge building activity, takes a serious look at how self-censorship is a two-edged sword. Here students' experience recorded in reflective journals show clear and frequent mismatches to their interactions online. Decisions made here were also informed by team role preference.

Both papers at micro level acknowledge the connections the authors' decisions have made to achieving and sustaining macro level objectives. Every action and interaction in a class, whether face to face or online, is an enactment of course, university or broader discipline goals. While unintentional, the final papers in this issue brings us back neatly to those at the beginning showing a continuity of purpose irrespective of level of engagement with curriculum design.

JLD says Thank You

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