JLD Journal of Learning Design
DESIGNING FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

EDITORIAL

Volume 6 No. 1

Multiple approaches to understanding and engagement: Entry points

The papers of this issue might well be seen as a serendipitous corroboration of Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Approaches To Understanding (Gardner, 1999). This theory, arguably less well known than Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983), speaks of five different entry points to engage students in the content to be studied. These include: **Narrational** (learning through stories); **Foundational/existential** (learning through posing fundamental kinds of questions); **Hands-on** (learning by and through doing); **Aesthetic** (learning through works of art); and, **Social** (learning through interaction with others). The papers in this issue have, inadvertently and in widely differing contexts, spoken of differing approaches to encouraging student understanding and engagement. The first five are from academic faculty who have designed learning experiences to engage students through well-reasoned and deliberate approaches. The final paper is from an instructional designer who speaks directly to the technological affordances used to engage and motivate students. All authors in this issue share a similar goal.

Our first paper, by Masters (La Trobe University), describes an entry point what could be classified as a *narrational* approach whereby students in Education degrees "tell" the story of their learning journeys through their progressive development and iterative review of eportfolios (electronic portfolios). Masters' paper also speaks of how this approach benefits from scaffolding which the author describes as being where "learners, whether they are adults or children, learn best when they are supported to pursue their own learning goals and when they are encouraged towards autonomy in learning." As well as the findings presented in this paper, the author cites evidence from the literature where writing and developing an eportfolio encourages "authentic reflection" and "deeper and more cohesive reflections." These, in short, are what mark this approach as narrational.

The second paper in this issue, by Sossou (from the University of Kentucky) and Dubus (from Wheelock College, Boston), exemplifies a *hands-on* approach to fostering understanding. It describes how students in social work undertake international fieldwork as "volunteer tourists" in Ghana. Here students gain unique insights through the entry point of participation and immersion in a community very different from their own. The authors conclude that "the guiding principle behind the asset based model is an appreciation of local values, and the inseparable relationship between human existence and the environment. It is informed by a reciprocal strengths-based approach that creates the feeling that all participants involved are treated equally and benefiting from the process." Where this approach is hands-on lies particularly in its emphasis on participation, democratic decision-making, self-determination, and social integration. It might also be argued that immersing young people in a different culture and circumstances might also classify this approach as *foundational/experiential* because participants would find themselves questioning many things they may have taken for granted.

Third, Schultz (Queensland University of Technology) explains how sustainability – through what could be classified as a *foundational/experiential* approach - is unconventionally but critically applied as an entry point in the teaching of Chemistry. Here, Schultz describes how environmental sustainability can be, and she argues should be, embedded in the undergraduate Chemistry curriculum. Her intention is to encourage students to question their fundamental beliefs about sustainability and climate change while gaining core content knowledge and respect for their discipline. As with the previous papers in this issue, this author has designed learning experiences which are bold and ambitious. And, as with the others, it is founded in a profound understanding of its discipline to engender a broad range of skills and understandings.

The fourth paper, by Willis, Davis, and Chaplin (Queensland University of Technology) is a cross-disciplinary study of how differing technologies can underpin a *social* approach to student engagement and motivation. Three tertiary teachers – in Accountancy, Education, and Library and Information Studies respectively – purposefully designed learning experiences to create communities of learners. They have found that selecting and scaffolding the "right" medium or platform is key to enhancing student engagement. For these authors, moving into this space is an experiment in learning design, a first step to adopting technologies as the entry point to achieve desired learning outcomes. There is an interesting (and acknowledged) parallel between the authors' own learning journey (entry point) and the one they wished for their students.

Next, the fifth paper, by Hardre and Kollmann (University of Oklahoma) intriguingly fits into the theme of this issue in both its content and the pedagogical approach it describes. It is concerned – like part of a virtuous circle - with the study of instructional design (ID) which its authors explain is based in the "social, emotional, aesthetic and organisational complexity of authentic human interactions." The authors' teaching approach here might be classified as *hands-on* in terms of its being based in "the dynamic of active learning in an applied classroom with multi-source inputs and authentic project-based tasks." It might also be regarded as *"social"* in approach because of its attention on peer feedback and group activities. It creates entry points for its students who, in turn, create entry points for others.

Finally, the sixth paper in this issue, by Swann (from Mindleaders Inc.), is concerned with student engagement from the perspective of the instructional designer. It differs from the previous papers in how it considers learner motivation and its influence by the application of two different cognitive learning principles. It is also arguably the only one of the six papers in this issue to adopt an *aesthetic* approach to learning design. While the initial definition of an aesthetic entry point was restricted to a "work of art," here the entry points are the text, audio, animation and video which become the artistic media of the instructional designer. This paper belongs with the others in this issue in its focus on enhanced learning outcomes for students.

JLD says thank you

Our sincere thanks go firstly to Stephanie Beames who served as Production Editor for JLD from 2010-2012 and has now moved on to other pursuits. She was instrumental in coordinating our special Science education issues (Vol 3 No 3 and Vol 4 No 3) and encouraging many new authors in that field to delve into the murky waters of academic publishing. She brought energy and dedication to her role. Matthew Lloyd has assumed the work of Production Editor and Copy Editor.

As we launch Volume 6 of the Journal with this issue, we would also like to thank the guest editors and reviewers of Volume 5, which appeared during 2012. In alphabetical order, these were:

- Craig Baird, Curtin University, Australia

- Nicky Carr, RMIT, Australia
- Hernan Casakin, Ariel University Center of Samaria, Israel
- Robyn Davidson, University of Adelaide, Australia
- Andrea Duff, University of South Australia, Australia
- Katja Fleischmann, James Cook University, Australia
- Judith McNamara, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
- Julia Miller, University of Adelaide, Australia
- Maxine Mitchell, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia
- Shirley Reushle, University of Southern Queensland, Australia
- Maree Simpson, Charles Sturt University, Australia
- Calvin Smith, Griffith University, Australia
- Annika Wiklund-Engblom, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

We would like to extend particular thanks to Andrea Duff and Julia Miller who were guest editors for the special issue, *Classrooms without walls/Borderless classrooms* (Vol 5 No 2).

Thank you also to our contributing authors.

Margaret Lloyd
Nan Bahr
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

References

Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of mind. New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. E. (1999). Multiple approaches to understanding. In C.M. Reigeluth (Ed.), Instructional-design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory, Vol.2 (pp. 69-89). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.