

Applied Learning - benefits, risks and enablers

The idea of Applied Learning uses Herrington's Nine Principles of Authentic Learning (2014). It presents the potential benefits, risks, and enablers of adopting an applied learning approach structured according to student, academic and management perspectives.



Sheffield Hallam University's Applied Learning Academic Interest Group (8 March 2017) produced this guidance as an outcome of a simulation activity to develop the concept of Applied Learning at Sheffield Hallam University.

Applied Learning is an emerging idea that reflects existing practice as well as looking at how the student course experience can be enriched through aligning the student's role in the curriculum more closely with real world situations. The benefits of doing this are established in thinking about situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989).

The following guidance is split between:

1. Applied Learning Benefits
2. Applied Learning Risks
3. Applied Learning Enablers and Support
4. Other points to consider
5. References

1. Applied Learning Benefits

Students	Academics	Managers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore knowledge and my capabilities in ways I haven't experienced before; • Gaining real world experience relating to my course that will shape my thinking; • Having an external dimension to my learning experience that will challenge me and allowing me to build my learning identity; • Apply and test theoretical knowledge to actual situations similar to those I may encounter in my career. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I get to see real world people, including the opportunity to work with former colleagues and networks; • Take students outside of the physical university space so we can see the course in a different light and get to know each other more about each other; • Connecting theory to practice by generating and including more meaningful examples; • Having options to presenting knowledge in diverse ways to enhance engagement with and amongst diverse groups; • Develop a stronger sense of course community, for example by creating situations in which more experienced students and alumni inspire and support less experienced students e.g. in ambassador roles; • Create a student as producer context where students create artefacts that are useful to others; • Create authentic connections across individual modules to develop course identity, e.g. connecting assessments, feedback? Or whole course e.g. "ethos"? distinctiveness • Academics will need time to come on board gradually • A useful method to develop student's social, cultural and emotional intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Learning aligns to the University strategy; • It makes an attractive and relatively distinct offer to attract students • Provide a different way to address NSS and the TEF; • It's a good way to generating business

2. Applied Learning Risks

Students	Academics	Managers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must engage students as partners properly; and they must all be clear why engaging in applied approaches makes sense; • Managing communication with students about unfamiliar learning methods is critical to its success; – for example, what do each of us understand by ‘real world’? We need to be clear what we mean and the value of this; What does ‘content’ look like? What will assessment and feedback look like and will it be fair? What happens to learning theory? Is lecturing bad? • Staff can get carried away and may leave students behind;. Therefore, expectations need to be managed; • We must be careful not to exclude students, e.g. if learning becomes it is too dependent on technology; or if activities preclude disabled students from engaging; • Prerequisite teaching and learning capabilities may be uneven in student cohorts but are critical to active and applied learning approaches – but do students want to spend time developing their capabilities when they could be sitting in a lecture listening? Be clear about the benefits. • Academics need to be able to facilitate student engagement so that students with diverse backgrounds are included. Academics must not feel as though they are in the middle of something they don’t understand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academics need to know how to confidently use action-based learning and applied learning methods. Time for CPD or peer support strategies may be needed. Time should be allowed to develop capabilities. • Applied learning is flexible, responsive and potentially open-ended and needs to be monitored and evaluated. Focusing on delivering the intended learning outcomes is what matters. • Academic capability and experience of the real world is uneven. Applied learning requires courses to monitor and actively develop connections with real world sources and networks. Courses can focus on maintaining connectivity and collecting more real voices and stories. • Staff teams, not individuals alone, will be needed to ensure against a possible danger of inconsistent practice. • Applied learning needs to focus everyone on the future learning or graduate contexts and avoid being sucked into historic practices and experiences. Always connect past stories to current and future practices and innovations. • Assessing applied learning is different, but like any good assessment design, models constructive alignment i.e. activity and learning outcomes define appropriate assessment methods and criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A concern – Can staff actually deliver this? • It would have implications on NSS both positive and negative; • A requirement for accountability – it will need additional resources; • Any simulation software, CPD etc will have cost implications; • Potential consequences on employer relations; • Quality assurance and innovation; • A lot of potential process change; • Possible ethics implications, especially around crossing boundaries and data management; • Innovative practice needs to be recognised and celebrated.

3. Applied Learning Enablers and Support

Students	Academics	Managers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all students experience a level playing field during the planning of activities, not as an afterthought; • Timetabling to be co-ordinated with the range of activities and suitable learning spaces being used; • We need to break the dependency on assessment and credit as the only way of motivating student engagement. Applied learning is largely about creating engaging and motivational contexts; • Student induction is critical. Students need to be briefed for applied learning activities, but they also need to be prepared and expectations for engagement need to be clarified; • Academic tutors need to become more accessible as the teacher role shifts; • Applied learning exploits current and authentic situations so more effort is needed to develop knowledge in up to date contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to delivering staff CPD for this approach is needed; • Evidence of successful practice is needed, so a methodical approach to evaluating innovation is needed too; • Use different contextualised approaches rather than a one-size fits all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting this practice is critical to SHU's competitiveness; • We need to recognise engagement in different ways e.g. work on apprenticeships and involving employers in assessment.

4. Other points to consider

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic Academic Work Planning and student time; • Peer and formative feedback; • Better understanding of assessment that reflects an applied approach; • CPD focusing on course leaders and course-based design; • Need to not throw everything out when bringing something new in; • Develop a good voice and common language around this approach; • Other routes such as part-time need to be considered when applying this approach e.g. how do we define applied learning?
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5. References

Brown, J.S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (Jan. – Feb., 1989), pp. 32-42

Herrington, J., Parker, J. & Boase-Jelinek, D. (2014). Connected authentic learning: Reflection and intentional learning. *Australian Journal of Education*, 58(1), pp. 23–35.