

Inspiring Learner Engagement

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Introduction

Course design improves when students, employers, support staff, and other design partners are involved from the beginning. However, Nicol & Draper (2009) say transformative academic innovations can be stifled by a lack of teaching and learning knowledge among those tasked with designing courses. The use of design lenses addresses this by presenting a set of seven inspirational and informative principle-based cards for use by multi-stakeholder teams engaged in designing and reviewing curricula together.

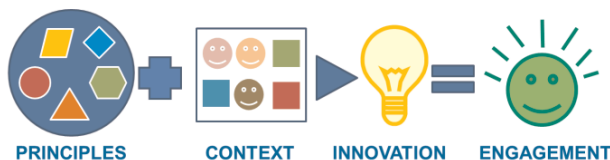
Why Learner Engagement is important

Studies on progression consistently note the importance of nurturing a culture of belonging within the academic and social community of higher education. Worryingly the UK *What Works?* project found that "between 33% and 42% of students think about withdrawing" in their first year of study (Thomas, L., 2012, p. 4). This can be addressed most effectively "in the academic sphere through student-centred learning and teaching" (ibid, p.10).

Creative and innovative teaching and learning puts the learner at the centre and values the development of inclusive communities of practice. Curriculum design creates an opportunity for thinking differently about how this is done.

Principles for Learner Engagement

A lot has been written about Learner Engagement and several sets of principles have been published with the aim of setting out what good teaching looks like. The Sheffield Hallam University Learner Engagement toolkit encapsulates this and relies heavily on Chickering and Gamson's 7 Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (1987).



- Student-Staff Contact
- Peer Co-operation
- Active Learning
- Feedback
- Self-Efficacy
- High Expectations
- Flexibility

References

Chickering, A.W. and Gamson, Z.F. (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Available online at: <http://www.uis.edu/liberalstudies/students/documents/sevenprinciples.pdf> and <http://bit.ly/171XX4Q>
Nicol, D. and Steve Draper, S. (2009). A blueprint for Transformational organisational change: REAP as a case study. Online at: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/learningandtech/Transforming-14.pdf>
Thomas, L. (2012) What works? Student retention and success - building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change, Summary Report, HEFCE, HEA, Action on Access, Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Online at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/what-works-student-retention/What_works_summary_report.pdf

The development of a curriculum design toolkit

Design Lens

Design lenses are sets of cards for use in curriculum design activities. Each set has a specific focus such as Learner Engagement. Their purpose is to inspire and inform academic staff and others involved in designing or revising courses. Typically a set of cards will use an established set of principles for good academic practice and present ideas exemplifying a principle for design teams' consideration.



Using the Design Lens

The lens is intended to inform and inspire design teams and individuals. The ideas on the cards offer a starting point for a train of thought or conversation that might begin "What would that look like if we did this with our students?" Design collaborators use one or more sets of cards together, perhaps arranging them on a time line, developing and noting ideas for teaching and learning. There are different sets of lenses too (e.g. Assessment & Feedback, Information Literacy, etc.). These can be used together or separately. The cards can also be used by individuals, as a focus for Peer Supported Review, and for the evaluation of existing provision, for example.

Curriculum Design Toolkits

The design lens is part of a larger toolkit. Once design teams have identified key ideas from design lens activities they can refer to case studies, videos, HE sector reports, and related policy and strategy documents. A collection of new *Teaching Essentials* toolkits are being developed by cross-faculty development teams and will be available at

<http://goo.gl/qu3fh>

