Unleashing the imagination in learning, teaching and assessment: design perspectives, innovative practices and meaning making

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‘Design thinking’ is a way of conceptualising possibilities and creating opportunities to enhance and improve the way we learn, work and live. The key objective of this workshop is to explore the relationship of design thinking to the process of ‘unleashing the imagination’ in learning, teaching and assessment. The workshop presents the following five design thinking techniques:

- **metaphors** to assist in conceptualising the educational opportunities we design
- **mind mapping** to explore innovative assessment opportunities
- **problem posing** to examine innovative assessment challenges
- **problem solving** to design innovative assessment solutions
- **reflective thinking** to assist in devising ways of integrating sustainable learning with innovative assessment.

Participants engage with design thinking tasks, scenarios, pair work and group discussions. These activities are used to explore the workshop themes of design perspectives, innovative practices and meaning making: that is, the expectations, experiences and engagement we design for our students. The workshop has theoretical and practical implications for academics wishing to create innovative assessment and sustainable learning. It aims to provide participants with design thinking techniques, examples, ideas, resources and links to imagine design perspectives, innovative practices and meaning making within their own pedagogical contexts. The facilitator is a PhD candidate at Macquarie University exploring fostering creativity as a graduate capability.

**Keywords:** design thinking; imagination; innovative assessment; sustainable learning

**Theme:** innovative assessment: opportunities and challenges

**Background**

Design is all around us – internal, external, beautiful, brash, manufactured, natural, superficial, useful – our aesthetic responses to it are both conscious and subconscious. These perceptions are evolving processes of ‘transaction’ (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) – or synthesis – within and between individuals and the environment. Pedagogical design is similarly dynamic, provoking reactions and fostering actions and interactions within an educational landscape:

A curriculum is always, in part, a curriculum-in-action. It is always being realized in situ ... curriculum design has to open spaces so that the student can develop in different ways and in her own style. A curriculum has to become like so many ultra-modern buildings, full of light and open spaces, different textures, shapes and relationship and arrangements for serendipitous encounters (Barnett & Coates, 2005, p. 129).

How we envision, create and contribute to our educational, social and cultural landscapes is limited only by our imaginations. The manner in which we conceptualise, explore, question, resolve and make sense of the diversity and complexity that surrounds us is becoming increasingly understood in terms of ‘design’. Design is immediate in that it frames the pedagogical environment and facilitates the innovative assessment within a “space of learning” (Marton et al., 2005). The design of the curriculum also has longer-term implications with regard to sustainable learning – in the preparation of students for an “unknown future” (Bowden & Marton, 1988):

Curriculum is a design for the future (see Kress 1995). The contents and processes put forward in curriculum and in its associated pedagogy constitute the design for future human dispositions. They provide one set of important means, and resources for the individual’s transformative, shaping action in making herself or himself as social humans. (Kress 2000, p. 161)

**Workshop structure**
‘Design thinking’ is a way of conceptualising possibilities and creating opportunities to enhance and improve the way we learn, work and live. The key objective of this 90-minute workshop is for participants to explore how design thinking relates to the process of ‘unleashing the imagination’ in learning, teaching and assessment. Through multimodal images and texts, the workshop models five design thinking techniques: metaphors, mind mapping, problem posing, problem solving and reflective thinking. Participants will engage with design thinking tasks, scenarios, pair work and group discussions throughout the workshop. These activities are used to explore the workshop themes of design perspectives, innovative practices and meaning making: that is, the expectations, experiences and engagement we design for our students.

**Design perspectives**

This section of the workshop relates to the conference theme “assessment for sustainable learning within and beyond the course”. The design thinking technique of metaphors assists in conceptualising the knowledge, experiences and capabilities we aspire for our students; in turn, affecting the assessment opportunities we choose and design. Design perspectives are explored through images, texts and discussion to increase participants’ awareness of the relationship between design and learning, as well as the concept of design as a pedagogical tool. This aspect of the workshop highlights how “design in advance” (Barnett & Coates, 2005) relates to the “intended object of learning” (Marton et al., 2005); that is, the expectations we have for our students.

**Innovative practices**

This section of the workshop relates to the conference theme “innovative assessment: opportunities and challenges”. It explores how design perspectives can assist in the discovery, deliberation and design of innovative practices within learning, teaching and assessment. The design thinking techniques of mind mapping, problem posing and problem solving are used to: explore innovative assessment opportunities, examine innovative assessment challenges and design innovative assessment solutions. Workshop participants are given tasks and scenarios to practise the techniques of mind mapping, problem posing and problem solving. This section of the workshop demonstrates how “design-in-action” (Barnett & Coate, 2005) relates to the “enacted object of learning” (Marton et al., 2005); that is, the experiences we design for our students.

**Meaning making**

‘Meaning making’ is the process of making sense of our world, knowledge and selves: “All knowledge, all science, thus aims to grasp the meaning of objects and events ...” (Dewey, 1997, p. 117). The design thinking technique of reflective thinking is modelled for workshop participants and then practised in context. Reflective thinking will assist academics to devise ways to integrate sustainable learning within innovative assessment. This section of the workshop relates to the conference theme “assessment for sustainable learning within and beyond the course” and the “lived object of learning” (Marton et al., 2005); that is, the engagement we design for our students.

**Workshop synthesis**

This workshop intends to have theoretical and practical implications for academics wishing to create innovative assessment and sustainable learning. It aims to provide participants with models and practices of design thinking techniques to imagine design perspectives, innovative practices and meaning making within their own pedagogical contexts. Case studies illustrating how the concept of design is influencing higher education and society around the world will be highlighted, alongside additional literature and resources for academics to explore beyond the workshop. The ultimate aim of the workshop is to spark participants’ inspiration and to “consider designing as a conversation with the materials of a situation” (Schon, 1983, p. 78).

**References**


