

Towards a philosophical underpinning for effective learning and teaching

This is a work in progress. For any higher education programme to have educational integrity, a set of statements about the overarching (or underpinning) theoretical framework should be apparent. The term theoretical framework is a contestable one but for the purposes of this document, it is proposed that the term refers to a series of nominated relevant constructs which are connected to learning, and in particular to the design, delivery and assessment of learning within a university context. Such learning, when it is interconnected into a coherent program of courses and assessable activities can, upon successful completion, lead to the awarding of a qualification.

This document is very short. There is a table that outlines three approaches to teaching which is an activity that is almost always linked to learning. There are seldom any neither completely correct nor any completely incorrect approaches to learning and teaching because learning is almost inevitably a multifaceted process. However, it is useful to differentiate between approaches to learning and teaching by indicating what a program mainly seeks to do by way of a delivery approach and, therefore, what approaches to delivery it seeks to downplay.

Irrespective of approaches to learning and teaching, all education occurs within a context and has a range of forms. These are very briefly noted within the second part of this document and dimensions of, or features of learning are also noted.

The caveat is given that there is more work to be completed in formulating a considered statement that conveys a coherent rationale that can guide ways in which the proposed revision will occur.

Forms of teaching for learning: the three 'gogies'.

Education can be thought of as being concerned with the *matter* (curriculum), the *manner* (teaching and learning processes) and *cognitive perspectives* (R. S. Peters, 1973). That trio of considerations enables an easy way of thinking about how to proceed. What should be taught is the *matter*; how it should be taught is the *manner*; and what must be achieved are *cognitive perspectives* (learning outcomes a la Blooms taxonomy). Starting with *cognitive perspectives* helps clarify *outcomes* and how to plan down from where learners and teachers want to end up.

Pedagogy	Andragogy	Heutagogy
<i>Teacher-directed learning</i>	<i>Self-directed learning</i>	<i>Self-determined learning</i>
The professional craft of teaching	Helping learners to develop their capacity for self-direction	Teachers prompt and partner learners to learn for themselves
Teachers/school/NZQA determine curriculum	Teacher-learner decisions made collaboratively	Learners reflect upon what and how they learn
Teacher sets learning goals	Teachers and learners develop goals together (learners need to know material, and/or how to solve a problem)	Learners create new goals based on their reflection and expressed needs
Teacher specifies learning activities	Teacher sets options from which learners can choose	Learner directed
Helping learners to learn content, skills, application, synthesis and evaluation	Teacher helps learners to learn, understand, apply, synthesise and evaluate, often drawing on prior experience	Helps learners to understand how they learn (process)
Fait accompli contract set by teacher	Negotiated, collaboratively determined contracts	Learner-defined learning contracts
Teacher sets timetable	Flexibility and choices within set timetables.	Flexible curriculum; open timetables; workshop options with learners as partners
Teacher constructs questions for learning	Teachers-learners co-construct questions	Learner-directed questions and inquiries
Teacher sets assessment	Teacher-learner negotiate assessments – criteria clear and shared	Flexible and negotiated assessments
Reflective practice – learning journals and portfolios show progress		
Whole class, group and individual teaching approaches based on teacher-assessed needs	Flexible group teaching based on continually changing and expressed learning goals	Learners identify their needs, set goals and devise next steps

The most recent iteration can be termed *techno-heutagogy* and involves increasing levels of Blend-Ed and/or onLine learning¹.

¹ This page adapted from earlier versions (Hansen & Hansen, 2014) which were constructed after Internet perusals.

Salient features of learning²

Enabling learning to happen is the most prominent feature of education. Indeed, that is the central purpose of education. Learning is thus central to lifelong human development irrespective of the role of the teacher, the characteristics of learners, and, the variety of forms and modes of delivery. Learning can occur within *formal* settings (e.g. early childhood centres, schools and universities). It can also transpire within *non-formal* situations (e.g. community classes, continuing education seminars, individualized study programs), and *informally* (e.g. Individualized Internet searches or learning projects or learning with the help of an acquaintance or family member).

Irrespective of form and mode, contemporary learning can occur *synchronously* (in real time) or *asynchronously* (at a distance when learners are separated from designers and deliverers of learning). It can also have a range of configurations including *face-to-face* (where learners and teachers interact in real time), *blended learning* (where some learning occurs in real time and some occurs either before and/or after the face-to-face learning episode), and *Online learning* (where all learning materials are delivered via the Internet and where all learning and assessment activities are completed and submitted to teachers via the Internet).

An important consideration in contemporary education is the physical context within which learning occurs because increasingly, technology multiplies learning possibilities and expands options for delivery. Hence, contemporary learning processes and state of the art technologies for learning are increasingly inseparable. This means that design for learning is, to a large extent, not only linked to desired learning outcomes, but also to whatever technologies are used for learning delivery and associated assessment activities. Learning design and learning technologies, together with the availability and type of learning spaces, therefore, influence how learning will be designed and delivered. In turn, delivery platforms and the possibilities they afford to learners, define the possibilities for interaction between communities of learners.

Given the above factors, the following salient features about the nature of learning should be borne in mind when developing learning programs, courses, activities, resources, assessments and support for learning. But at the same time, the framework shown on the previous page and the configuration types nominated above should also be kept in mind when designing learning no matter what the level.

Learning is situated

- Learning occurs within an individual as well as between individuals in groups and between individuals and groups within communities
- Learning responds to the context in which it occurs Macro (global/national), meso (institutional), micro (individual)

² These pointers were itemised by Professor Stephen Marshall after a meeting with Academic Developers at the UNSW and submitted by him as a *Philosophy of Education for the redevelopment of the Graduate Certificate of University Learning and Teaching (GCULT)*. Subsequently they were revised and renamed by Jens Hansen with Marshall's endorsement.

Experience is central to learning

- Experience shapes the ways we understand the world.
- Learn from past experiences but also from being in experience.
- Learn from our own and others' experience.

Learning is purposeful

- Learning needs are shaped by expectations and emerge from our past/current experience of context, beliefs and understandings, and the purposes of learning are negotiated and evolve over time.
- Learning responds to challenges.
- Assessment and feedback guides learning.

Learning is an active process of making sense

- Activity is essential to the process of personal meaning making.
- The process of making sense of learning can involve internalization.
- Scaffolding learning from the simple to the complex, by themes and by grouping enhances sense making.

Learning benefits from diversity

- Learning thrives within an environment that encourages and values diversity.
- Learning also thrives when learning processes are diverse.

Learning is complex and messy

- Learning needs an environment that encourages people to experiment and take risks.
- Enabling learning requires constant monitoring of students' learning responses and adjustments to teaching strategies to meet evolving needs.

Concluding note

There are other factors which warrant further careful crafting as additions to this preliminary document. A goal for any course redevelopment project is to 'rejig' two existing programs – whether it is an existing one or a 'yet to be developed' one. The work we need to undertake in making self-directed study become more potent and related to students working towards successful course completion and achieving employment is just as important. A careful discussion about our values, goals, strategies, and more, needs to occur so that our beliefs become clarified.

Cheers

Jens