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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

A shared reflection process: Harnessing identity, sustainability and innovation for learning design

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In the COVID era, our University co-design team (established in 2019), faced the challenge of transitioning to digital education. For us learning designers in the team, the rapid move to online teaching and embracing an online work model wasn't just about new tech tools or platforms. It was about identity, consistency, and navigating the turbulent waters of the co-design ecosystem.

In 2020, our co-design team had fewer than 20 members, six of whom were learning designers. Here's the twist: five out of those six were new and we all had diverse skills and varied experience levels. Together, we attempted to navigate collaborating as part of a co-design team (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018, p. 10). This included academic experts, educational developers, media specialists and the wider teaching team (Vallis et al., 2022). While there were plenty of external narratives about what our learning design role should be, we needed to define it on our own terms, to help foster a sustainable learning design approach (Shalavin & Huber, 2021) within our co-design projects. We found ourselves in this unique 'third space' - not entirely academic but not just administrative (Ergün & Avc, 2018).

So, what did we do? Our LD team meetings morphed to more purposeful reflection sessions (Lopez-Real, 1970 and Chang et al., 2020). These bi-weekly discussions enabled transparency of the shared co-design challenges we were experiencing and our nebulous identity. By late 2020, we translated our reflections into action: a mission statement and 12 LD principles. And most importantly a clear outline of roles and responsibilities which offered clarity on tasks, boundaries, and needs not just for us but our wider co-design team. Whilst the roles and responsibilities of an LD directly affected our wider co-design team, they chose not to be directly involved in their formulation, despite their overall support of our endeavour.

A key takeaway? Teams as diverse as ours need a shared space. It's essential for understanding each other's perspectives, sharing insights, and working cohesively. Our reflection sessions matured into this essential space.

Three years on, our approach has been applied to over 100 subjects. Our reflection sessions? They've evolved into a 'Community of Practice', a testament to our commitment to innovation and collaboration.

The co-design team has since doubled in size and the identity and roles we carved out for our learning designers have guided us through this growth phase. We have maintained a cohesive approach and the documents we worked on our now organic to our practice.

At the upcoming Pecha Kucha session, we'll:
1. Discuss challenges we encountered and how shared reflection helped.
2. Outline our reflection journey, from organic discussions to defining our mission and principles.
3. Share experiences from navigating team growth while maintaining our identity.
4. Showcase the tools and frameworks we've built along the way.

Our journey has been about much more than just adapting to change. It's been about understanding our role, finding our voice, and carving out our unique space in the co-design landscape.

Keywords: identity, learning design, co-design, shared reflection, sustainability, innovation,

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