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# Academic Development through Intensive Learning Design

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Participating in learning design sessions is a transformative learning experience for academic staff. This poster traces the emergent relationship between an academic and a learning designer during an intensive 4-hour learning design session, visually representing the interplay and intensity of six key domains across the session: approach, emotion, relationship, design-as-process, design-as-product, and capability-building. The poster demonstrates the relationship between the domains and their dispersal throughout a session, to illustrate how the challenge to and transformation of attitudes towards technology-enhanced learning (TEL), helping to overcome common resistance to change, providing a richer, more productive understanding of how academic development can be foregrounded through learning design.

Keywords: Academic development; learning design; technology-enhanced learning

## Background

As universities continue to direct academics to deliver more technology-enhanced learning experiences, the role of the learning designer increasingly involves informal academic development. This includes influencing positive changes to attitudes and mindsets in the face of general reluctance and resistance to change (Deaker, Stein, & Spiller 2016), especially regarding technology integration (Howard 2013; Westberry et al. 2015). Learning design as a separate and specialized domain of educational research has matured considerably over the past decade; research has begun to define and interrogate design methods and methodologies, conceptual frameworks, pedagogical patterns, and sequences of activities, as well as examine tools and resources to support the design process (Bennett et al 2011; Dalziel 2013; Dobozy 2013). A substantial body of research on teachers' beliefs has emerged over the last few decades, including attitudes towards educational technology (Bain & McNaught 2006); however, studies of learning design as an academic development activity, its impact on teachers' pedagogical beliefs, skills, and practices, are less common. Academic development itself has recently shifted away from formal and structured activities towards experiential (Kolb 1984) and situated (Lavé & Wenger 1993) learning approaches, identifying and utilizing learning opportunities for academics in everyday work (Boud and Brew, 2013). As facilitated learning design becomes part of academics' standard professional practice, it shows potential to mature from educational notation into a transformative learning experience (Mezirow 1991).

## Process

Our research process is experiential rather than empirical, and emerges from the practice of five learning designers. The team delivers rapid, intensive, personalized, contextualized 4-hour sessions, working with a number of partners in the higher education sector. Based on this experience, the team attempts to describe the relationship between an academic and a learning designer. Data collection occurred through collaborative critical self-reflection and interrogation, wherein key patterns and themes emerged from descriptions of practice. Alternative patterns of behaviour were observed, analyzed and synthesized, and finally visually represented across a sequence or continuum which typically structures the sessions.

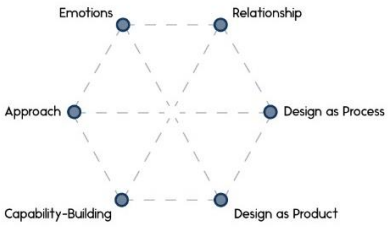


**Figure 4. Matrix of the six domains**

## Domains

The emergent relationship between an academic and a learning designer is shown. The six domains (fig. 1) are mapped across the key phases of a 4-hour session—onboarding, positioning, negotiation, awareness, and transformation —to visually represent their interplay and intensity across the continuum (fig. 2).

- **Approach:** Designing for TEL is still often unfamiliar and daunting for academics, and there remains a culture of substitution and augmentation rather than modification or redefinition. Designers must personalize and contextualize their approach to suit academics' prior knowledge, experience, and mindset. This starts with a dialogue, customized to the design setting and teaching context. Designers' personal and professional experience, and knowledge base, helps to build credibility.
- **Emotion:** Emotions play a vital role in the transformation of thinking required for effective design. Designers build the relationship through both verbal dialogue *and* a complex world of non-verbal clues. How does the academic react to a new idea? Are they excited, indifferent, or dismissive? How best to convince someone that a particular approach is more suited to TEL? Tension, arising from these negotiations, incites academics to move beyond their comfort zone and consider new perspectives.

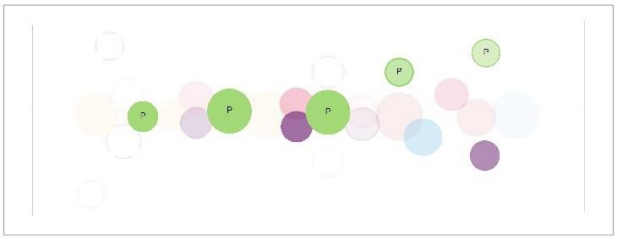

**FIGURE 5. POSTER EXCERPT, "INSIGHT: DESIGN**

- **Relationship:** Productive human relationships are an essential component of learning design. Designers actively engage the academic to transform thinking. Meaning is continually renegotiated through the processes of participation and reification (Wenger 1998); building a strong relationship, by engaging in this inter-disciplinary knowledge exchange, provides a mechanism for the negotiation of meaning.
- **Design-as-Process:** Process is the active co-construction of new knowledge. Designers and academics collaborate as an inter-disciplinary team, re-conceptualizing their initial thinking, and leading to a design blueprint (the product). This is achieved through a combination of constructive dialogue, expert facilitation, and the application of design thinking approaches.
- **Design-as-Product:** A shared common goal provides a sense of empowerment. Designers and academics work to achieve a collaborative output in a form of a cohesive, constructively aligned activity, unit, course, or even degree. This can include the structure or sequence of learning, activities, resources, and tools for effective learning in the online environment. The product is a transformative stage in itself.
- **Capability-Building:** Academic capability building occurs throughout all the phases and in all domains of a session. Capability building occurs primarily through the transformation of attitudes. This is not a linear process, but rather a complex interplay between academic and designer. Transformation occurs gradually, with learning design (as a practice, process, and product) foregrounding academic development—from raising awareness and building knowledge, to acquiring skills and improving practice, to altering academic mindsets and identities as teachers.

## Significance

Further research is required to more fully describe the experience of learning design sessions from academics' perspectives and mindsets. However, it is already clear that participating in facilitated learning design sessions can be a fundamentally transformative learning experience for academic staff. Better understanding learning design as more than educational notation, but also an experiential and situated form of academic development, can assist designers and universities to better understand academics' mindsets, overcome resistance to change regarding TEL, and facilitate more effective design and learning outcomes all around.

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