reconnect

Reconnecting relationships through technology

Building institutional cultures of creative risk taking in educational design

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Creative risk taking is at the heart of innovation, and therefore a valuable skill in educational design (Henderson, *et al.*, 2022; Glover, 1977). Equally important is the skill of being able to learn from when those risks result in unexpected or undesirable outcomes (Manalo & Kapur, 2018; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Vedder-Weiss, et al., 2018). However, in our observations creative risk taking and productive failure in educational design are rarely discussed let alone celebrated within higher education institutions. This silence is mirrored in the research literature. Despite a growing body of research around creative risk taking and productive failure in teaching (for example see: Creely, et al., 2021; Henriksen et al., 2021), there continues to be a need for empirical studies of educational designer experiences and practices.

This poster reports on six narrative-based case studies of creative risk taking and productive failure. They have been drawn from the experiences of 12 educational designers working centrally and across nine faculties in a large metropolitan Australian university.

The cases were developed through an iterative storying approach, within an adaptation of autoethnographic narrative inquiry. This approach was designed to elicit and synthesize complex, personal and, sometimes, emotionally charged case studies. The data and analysis were further enhanced through a secondary process of analytic focus groups which interpreted and made meaning of the narratives. Thematic analysis of the narrative stories and transcripts of the focus groups led to co-constructed propositions about the barriers, inhibitors, and opportunities for creative risk taking and productive failure in educational design work.

This study confirms that creative risk taking and productive failure are common and valuable practices of educational design. The study also confirms that there is a broad aversion to openly acknowledging the risks and failures. This was partly due to a drive for narratives of success by institutions and education in general, combined with the often precarious positions of the designers themselves who work in a "third space" beside and between educators and students and who therefore have to establish and sustain the trust of those who they work with. Through the analysis of the cases it became apparent that the barriers to an enthusiastic culture of creative risk need to be addressed by both educational designers as well as institutional leaders.

The poster will describe the problem, extant literature, and methodology. The poster will also outline the six cases (key characteristics and insights). However, the focus of the poster will be on our key findings: seven broad strategies for educational designers and institutional leaders to promote changes in practice. These seven strategies are thematically organized under three themes:

1. Shape expectations
   - Normalize failure
   - Question the validity of success criteria
2. Redefine the process
   - Position failure as part of a process
   - Revise the language surrounding the work of educational design
3. Support the people involved
   - Recognize the emotional labour of failure and vulnerability in engaging with it
   - Involve others and resist internalising failure
   - Purposefully build trusting and candid relationships over time

The poster will elaborate on each of the seven strategies for both educational designers and institutional leaders.

Keywords: educational designer, learning designer, creative risk taking, productive failure

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