Curriculum Design Pattern

Global Learning by Design

As well as providing a mechanism for capturing solutions to common education problems, curriculum design patterns can also serve as a way to share, document and publish academic work that can be informally peer reviewed and expanded upon. Below is an outline of the fields that will be used to capture and share the Curriculum Design Patterns that are produced as part of the Global Learning by Design project at RMIT.

Name of Pattern	**Breaking the pattern: building critical thinking and reflection capabilities from the first assessment**
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Abstract

The aim of this pattern is to address a problem with engagement in early assessment. The intention of the reflective blog assessment task is to prepare students for development asprofessionals and to break a pattern of limited engagement in early assessment tasks. Early assessment tasks are for learning—rather than of learning. Students typically do not engage in these tasks because they are not assigned high-value grades and so they don't use the opportunity to develop academic communication skills. This early assessment task is an opportunity to challenge attitudes, manage expectations and change behaviours. It attempts to link theoretical foundations of the course to international development practice and to professional development. Reflective writing provides an opportunity for students to increase self-learning, develop insights and improve critical thinking and academic writing. It prepares masters students for engaging in professional development in their future international development practice.

Rationale

To break an existing pattern of limited engagement in early assessment tasks, to create a new pattern of engagement in early assessment tasks and to foster an ability to articulate insights and link learning to future professional practice. Also, to use a reflective writing pattern to encourage critical thinking.

Learners

The learners are undertaking an elective course in the Master of International Development program. The students are a mixture of first- and second-year students, online and face-to-face, domestic and international practitioners, and recent graduates with no field experience. Generally they are mature-aged and predominantly female. There are 20 to 30 students in a class, and roughly a third live overseas. All students require access to, and expertise in, the internet.

Related patterns

Developed pattern

Pattern 1: Recognising accustomed ways of learning

Other patterns to be developed:

— *Academic skills awareness 1:* Student self-awareness of their academic capacity for critical reading, writing and reflection

— E-learning is a core academic and professional capacity (therefore, this not limited to online students).

Category	Early Assessment, Personalisation, Academic Skills

Outcome/impact

Learners will be able to:

— develop critical evaluation skills

— write clearly

— link theory to practice

— develop insight

— habituate reflective practice

— focus on new learning and understanding

Students create their own blog sites in a public space (eg, Wordpress). This allows them to use the blog site as a digital repository for their learning and to track their progress. It also allows them to provide peer-feedback for their classmates.

Alignment

The reflective blog assignment gives the students an opportunity to improve their learning skills. This includes developing and expanding:

— technology skills

— networks within and beyond the class

— communication and writing skills

— research skills (eg, using RSS feed to collect relevant blogs).

Challenges

Reflective writing

Reflective writing is relatively new compared to other university assignments like essays and reports. Some students apply these writing styles to reflective writing, which does not work. Clear guidelines and rubrics are required to overcome these issues.

Plagiarism

The blog assignment is published on a public blog space and assessors cannot use TurnItin.

Privacy

This assignment is published on a public blog space and protecting students' privacy may be an issue in the future. In class, some explanation may be required to deal with this issue.

Blog design

A blog's appearance (its visual features)—its colour, font size and background design—can affect a reader's impression of the blog's quality. Although the assignment focuses on the quality of the writing, the blog's visual features also need to be considered by students and staff. Extra resources on blog design could be useful to address this issue.

Copyright

Students need to be aware of copyright issues in embedding images and video on their blog page.

Technical assistance

Students may need to get technical assistance to use a new format in the blog. This may be assisted by FAQ and lynda.com eg, www.lynda.com/WordPress-tutorials/WordPress-Essential-Training/154417-2.html.

Instructions/process

1. The assignment information needs to be included in the course guide. The assignment is due on the Monday in week.

2. In week 1, the purpose of the assignment is explained to students and the assignment pack is distributed on Blackboard.

3. In week 2, a reflective writing workshop is offered in class.

4. In week 3, a Q&A session regarding the assignment is offered in class (and FAQs posted on Blackboard).

5. In week 4, students reflect on the assignment (and add to FAQs).

6. In week 5, general feedback on the assignment is given to students in class.

Conditions

Provide a reflective writing pack for students in advance of the assignment due date.

The reflective writing pack includes reflective writing workshops, SLC reflective writing resources, an assignment guide and a rubric. The assignment guide shows examples of blogs written by students in the previous year. These materials help students to understand the content and expectation of the assignment.

Public blog websites

In class, we recommend students use Wordpress or Blogger, which are relatively easy to establish blog pages. Most of the students used Wordpress.

Resources

Reflective writing pack

Workshops via Blackboard Collaborate

— Reflective writing workshop by Cate O'Dwyer: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

— Library skills workshop by Tracey Love: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

SLC reflective writing resources

— Academic reflection: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

— Reflective writing DIEP: http://bit.ly/1kJ1BW3

— Academic paragraph structure TEEL: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

— Essays, Reports and Reflective writing: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

Assignment guide and rubric

— Assignment guide: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

— Rubric: http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

Course blog page

— http://bit.ly/1nK34uj

Course blackboard

Copyright and privacy issues

— RMIT University's Copyright *Quick Guide: Blogging:* http://bit.ly/1kJ1BW3

Library

— lynda.com offers a guide to blogging (Wordpress tutorials)

Reflection

Initially students misunderstood what was required for an academic reflection. They attempted to use descriptive writing or critical analysis without engaging specific insight. The performance and feedback from students led to a revision of the assignment pack.

The reflective writing pack, including models, enables students to understand the assignment task and the expectations. In the future, the model should be annotated with specific features of the genre pointed out.

Since 2013, this assessment task has been used in several courses at RMIT University and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT; Bangkok), and students have provided the course coordinator with positive feedback. Also, when comparing a student's first and last blog post, their writing skills and quality of critical reflection have gradually improved.

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Outcomes
— Develop new learning and understanding
— Develop critical analysis skill
— Link theory to international development practice

Process
— Week 1   Explanation of the assignment
— Week 2   Reflective writing workshops
— Week 3   Q&A session
— Week 4   Assignment submission
— Weeks 5-6 Provide feedback from peers and assessors

Inputs
— Reflective writing assignment pack
— Course guide