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.

Name of pattern	Recognising accustomed ways of learning: towards building critical capabilities for International Development professional practice
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Author/s	Robbie Guevara, Paul Battersby, Vandra Harris and Reina Ichii

Abstract   Early assessment in International Development postgraduate studies provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their educational experiences and introduces them to different approaches to teaching and learning that are responsive to the context of a changing world. These early activities help to establish the importance of developing the capacity for self-directed, independent and inquiry-based learning as the foundation of reflective practitioners who recognise the importance of ongoing learning.

Rationale

This pattern moves away from early assessment focused on developing an awareness in the student of the gaps in his/her academic skills to self-assessment of the student's accustomed ways of learning and the need to be aware of other ways of learning that are able to adapt and respond to the changing expectations from International Development professionals.

Learners/context

Students in their first year of postgraduate studies in an interdisciplinary field that aims to understand and respond to critical global issues like international development.

The following patterns were identified as linked to a broader view of early assessment from a programmatic perspective that builds towards the capstone course:

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

— Self-awareness: Why do I want to become a Development Professional?

— Career aspirations: How do I make the most of my studies to secure my dream career?

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

— Academic skills awareness 2: Staff awareness of students' academic capacity in critical reading, writing and reflection

— Peer Learning: Recognising the richness that can be learned from each other

— Community of Practice: Recognising the value of building a community of co-learners in International Development practice

— Capstone course: Early weaving of all of the above

Category

Early Assessment

Outcome/impact

An expected outcome is that students will develop an awareness of their preferred or accustomed learning style and also the existence of other ways of learning that will be used in postgraduate studies. These other ways of learning are valuable in professional practice.

Through the pattern, we hope students develop a capacity for self-directed, independent and inquiry-based learning that enables staff to engage in in-depth learning activities (transformative learning) rather than rote-learning activities.

Challenges

It is a dilemma that students may see critical self-reflection as a judgement of their previous or accustomed learning styles, rather than simply a mirror of the dominant nature of education.

To overcome this challenge, we create opportunities for students to hear from the experiences of other early career development professionals about the value of developing the capacities for self-directed, independent and inquiry-based learning within International Development professional practice. This is supplemented by readings from key educators (eg, Paulo Freire) in International development.

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Instructions/process

The process involves more than a single activity and is relevant for the duration of the course/subject.

1. Self-reflection on accustomed or preferred ways of learning through the use of a self-rating questionnaire that plots learning styles across four quadrants (via an online questionnaire that plots the results and also perhaps maps the different students across the different learning styles).

2. Self-reflection on experiences where learning was taught rather than self-directed (eg, via online blogs).

3. Self-directed learning opportunities that:

   a. Identify a relevant problem to investigate during the course/subject.

   b. Identify from the literature how others may have approached this problem and, more importantly, why they have approached it in this manner, and the outcomes.

   c. Consider the applicability of the proposed solutions from the literature in developing a response to the problem.

4. Critically reflect on the learning process by revisiting previously identified learning styles and how these learning styles are relevant within International Development professional practice.

It is important that these activities are conducted during the early part of the semester in a course/subject that is either in the first semester or first year of the program.

Conditions

Factors that influence the use of the pattern and potential solutions include the following:

1. The course coordinator and tutors need to play the role of facilitator and mentor. Given the individual nature of self-directed learning, it is important that the teaching staff can provide a certain level of individualised mentoring, therefore, the current assessment limit of one hour per course is not sufficient.

2. For the cycles of critical reflection to make sense, the cycles must be repeated within the same course to allow students to identify lessons learned and then apply them in the next cycle.

3. Feedback can be provided in class and also supported by peer mentoring.

Resources

The following resources are being considered for development:

1. International Development Induction Module (ID IM)
The current proposal is to develop an online International Development Induction Module (ID IM) that addresses self-awareness. We are proposing to structure it in quadrants. Each quadrant will engage students in reflecting on the following:

— Accustomed ways of learning.

— Self-awareness: 'Why do I want to become a development professional?'

— Career aspirations: 'How do I make the most of my studies to secure my dream career?'

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

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Resources
(continued)

The student can then find out more about themselves and how they relate to the student cohort (eg, preferred ways of learning), and staff are able to access cohort, not individual, data to help engage the students better. Aside from responding to each of the quadrants, the students are able to keep their results in a portfolio that travels with them throughout their degree so they can also reflect back on their self-awareness baseline at any point.

During their degree, students will be encouraged to upload reflections at the end of each semester either as course reflections or program learning outcomes reflections. We foresee that this information will form the Early Assessment task of the capstone course – a synthesis of their program/course reflections to help shape their capstone and career objectives.

The Self-Awareness on Academic Skills will contain elements from the current postgraduate On Track workshops conducted by the library *http://www.rmit.edu.au/research-candidates/on-track-workshops* and also the online reflective blog from the early assessment pattern.

2. More effective use of Blackboard courseware

One specific resource that can contribute to the ID IM is Blackboard. A program banner and a standard look for the Masters in ID Program can be developed and used across 11 core courses and the program shell. Blackboard and the course shells can also be linked to the ID IM and the students' portfolios.

Also, Blackboard will be linked to the International Development Program Triangle, which illustrates how the different courses are related to each other and bounded by the following key capabilities:

— specialised theoretical knowledge;

— advanced professional capabilities; and

— effective practice in International Development.

Reflection

A student's ability to self-reflect and evaluate what they have learned is central to measuring the success of this pattern. While part of this can be demonstrated via a critical and reflective essay, we think the best measure is when students are able to identify how different this experience has been from their accustomed way of learning and the value of this kind of learning for their future professional practice.

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