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The Realpedagogik – Linking Learning Design Research with Learning Design Practice

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Abstract: The ambition behind this paper is twofold. First, we hope to enrich the discourse around HE education research with the new conceptualisation we term '*realpedagogik*', that speaks to the *locus* of the encounter between the intended (models, policies, recommendations, guidelines, standards etc.) and the actualised. Second, we present the draft solution to resolve the tension in one such *locality* - Learning Design research translation inside Learning Design practice.

Recognising the limitations of LD research to effect transformational impact on practice, we set out to revisit some of the core assumptions of LD approach in the conceptualisations of *teachers as designers*. Over 2 years 2 HE teaching practitioners were studied with implementing LD approach in their teaching; the findings from this initial informal study are paving the way for future research work to reframe the problem and to develop productive solutions that will deliver on the transformational promise of LD.

Paper: The catalyst of the pandemic, with its social-distancing and remoting requirement, renewed interest in Learning Design (LD) (Laurillard, 2013). LD is a strand of education research aimed at systematising the operational facet of teaching practice and is often associated with Technology Enhanced Learning and eLearning in general; this view is reductive as LD approach is meta-pedagogical and modality-agnostic (ibid). Beyond this, LD approach is value free, it doesn't in itself promote any one pedagogical approach, it can be used to systematically develop didactic as well as constructivist learning; although it can be argued that the pedagogical methods (e.g. social-constructivism, constructionism etc.) themselves are also value free (Breuing, 2011).

In the two decades of its existence LD research has produced a plethora of ideas, models, tools and recommendations but has yet to evidence transformational impact in practice (Bennett et al., 2018).

This paper presents a research undertaking aimed at understanding the reasons behind this apparent lack of impact and to reimagine the implementation of LD that could potentially lead to uptake and transformation.

The transformational promise of the LD seems more unattainable than ever with the gap between LD research and teaching practice appearing to widen (Hager et al., 2018). The idealised view of pedagogical best practice, distilled from research, rarely maintains any semblance of its form on contact with the increasingly under-resourced practice contexts. Although this *ideal-real* discrepancy

is, to a greater or lesser extent, a feature of all disciplines, it is acutely prominent in education research and practice due to the range of ideological and political reasons (Ginsberg, 2011; Hager et al., 2018).

In our view, at the core of the problem is the assumption of *teachers as designers* and *teaching as design science* (Laurillard, 2008; Laurillard, 2013). The import from this assumption is that teachers will self-organise and evolve their practice given the LD tools and guidance.

Aside from the fact that this has not materialised after considerable effort (Bennett et al., 2018), the prognosis is that it cannot materialise as the implementational assumption of the approach is being misconceived.

The misconception is in the disconnect of the design from implementation, and the lack of tools that foreground implementation detail in the designing process. Literature is rich with specialist tools that would assist the design and thinking about the design of the teaching and learning, but this is removed from actual practice and implementation at scale (Bennett et al., 2018).

To remedy this we devised a two-part approach:

1. *Review and Reassign* - review the scope of the agency of the teachers within system of teaching reproduction (i.e. design-implement-evaluate-redesign) and reassign the elements that are outside this newly determined teacher scope to other agents or roles,
2. *Developing for Practice* – develop tools that foreground design implementation concerns and detail.

We call our approach *Realpedagogik*, this is to evoke the concept of *Realpolitik* - a system of politics or principles based on practical rather than ideological considerations.

The Realpedagogik approach corrects the LD course somewhat and takes more note of the 'infrastructure' circumstance - the 'invisible' conditions, and looks for the best fit to optimise the learning gain, to realise the 'ultrastructure' - the pedagogical goals.

What emerged from this approach is the recognition that the analytical and recommendation elements should be outside the scope of the teachers and assigned elsewhere in the system; the question then arises where and to what these elements can be productively reassigned to?

One productive direction for answering this question is in investigating the potential of emerging field of Teaching Analytics or Design Analytics (Hernández-Leo et al., 2019), in conjunction with the more established field of Learning Analytics (Wong & Li, 2020), to carry out the analytical and recommendation tasks within the system.

Therefore, the strategic aim should be to bridge real practice (at scale) with the emerging Teaching Analytics and Learning Analytics fields to effect the transformational change.

The LD tool-set used in this Preliminary Phase is currently being redeveloped to allow for generating a wider sample of teaching designs and from a wider range of teaching programmes in Phase 1. The output of Phase 1, in the form of well-articulated teaching designs, is planned to be used in Phase 2

as input to yet-to-be-developed Teaching Analytics modules. Phase 3 will couple the Teaching Design Analytics with Learning Analytics modules to produce the recommendations for the teaching redesign that will be consequently evaluated with teachers for the potential to deliver on transformation-at-scale promise of LD approach.

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