

1. Introduction

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Why this textbook, and why now?

Academia in Australasia and globally is increasingly a challenging environment as universities seek to come to terms with limited funding opportunities, more constrained regulatory requirements, reduced staffing budgets and new relationships with external communities. As more students attend universities, either commencing their studies or renewing them under the guise of lifelong and life-wide learning, institutions are required to find ways to adapt traditional approaches to more modern methods that meet the demands of diverse student bodies in cost-effective ways.

The role of the learning designer is central to this; they are often described as either third space professionals or third space academics, working as they do in the interstitial spaces between the traditional designations of professional and academic staff. The role of learning designer (however it is defined) is vital to the development, implementation and maintenance of online and blended learning approaches. This has seen a rapid rise in the need for well-trained and experienced learning designers, and a concomitant need for courses that offer learning design qualifications. Numerous Australian universities now offer these qualifications in both microcredential and postgraduate format.

As a result, learning designers are often involved in efforts to ensure that courses incorporate inclusivity and accessibility. This involves technical knowledge on digital accessibility, so that learning management systems (LMSs) are accessible and

comply with the latest version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), to ensure they are perceivable, operable, understandable and robust for all students including those with disabilities, access requirements or who use assistive technology like screen readers. This is related to the increasing diversity of the student cohort. Subjects, courses and programs at universities are beginning to recognise that diversity and tailor their educational offerings in such a way as to ensure that all students feel welcome. The notion of belonging, especially among first-year students, is an important aspect of students' ongoing success at university – and learning designers have a role to play in engendering that.

It is for this reason that this textbook has been developed. While there are similar textbooks available in other geographical locations (although few are Open Educational Resources), this book is unashamedly Australasian in its focus. This is because the Australasian tertiary education system has unique features. These includes the diversity of students, but also there is a need to consider the funding arrangements, the role of governments and the broader sociocultural context within the Australasian context. A key aspect of addressing this diversity is designing learning experiences that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their language, culture, accessibility needs, family or other commitments.

This textbook will equip learning designers and related professionals with the knowledge and skills to deal efficiently and effectively with that diversity. It provides detailed and comprehensive accounts of the ways that learning designers can work within their institutions to ensure that students' learning experiences are accessible and inclusive. It provides thoughtful and thorough case studies highlighting the need for learning design practices that privilege accessibility and inclusivity, in a variety of settings and from several different institutions.

This book is unusual in that it seeks to combine the perspectives of academics researching inclusivity and learning design with those of practising learning designers and similar roles. In some cases, this takes place in separate chapters, but in others, learning designers and academics have worked together to combine their expertise into a single chapter. This means that some chapters have more of a research or conceptual focus, while others are more practice-focused. We encourage readers to engage with all of the chapters. By combining the perspectives of academics with those of learning designers, this textbook provides learning designers with both a firm theoretical foundation for their practice and a helpful guide to implementing those practices in current university environments.

The greatest strength of this book lies in its diverse authorship, as it was thoughtfully written and developed by a diverse group. The authorial team represents a rich tapestry of culture, language, ethnicity and abilities, bringing unique perspectives to the chapters and the book as a whole. We also possess a wide range of expertise in primary, secondary and tertiary education, Australian Indigenous communities, immigrant experiences with education, adult learning and, of course, learning design.

Key terms

This section addresses the key ideas related to social justice, accessibility and inclusivity in learning design throughout the book, and authors will refer to these terms in order to explain the design choices they made and the reasons why they adopted those. With that in mind, a basic definition is presented here for each of these terms, although readers should keep in mind that these definitions are only a starting

point for understanding these terms and how they intersect with learning design.

Social justice is the fair and just treatment of all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other personal characteristics. It is about ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed in life.

Inclusivity is the practice of creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, respected and valued. It is about recognising and celebrating the diversity of people and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of society.

Accessibility is the ability of people with disabilities to access and use goods, services and facilities. It is about making sure that everyone can participate in society on an equal basis, regardless of their disability.

Topics covered in this book

The development and implementation of inclusive and diverse learning experiences is a vital consideration for educators in higher education. Increasingly, learning designers play a significant role in this process. This textbook offers postgraduate students a comprehensive guide to designing learning experiences that are accessible, equitable and inclusive. It provides advice, principles and practical strategies to help learning designers create a learning environment that recognises and celebrates diversity while promoting equitable learning outcomes. Through detailed accounts of theory and practice, it will canvas the following topics:

1. **Diversity and inclusion in learning:** Concepts of diversity and inclusion and their impact on the design of learning

experiences are discussed. Theories and concepts related to diversity and inclusion, such as cultural competence, intersectionality and social justice, are considered. The chapter also highlights the importance of recognising cultural differences and creating learning experiences that celebrate and embrace these.

2. **The role of learning designers in promoting diversity and inclusion:** Attention will be paid to the roles and responsibilities of learning designers in creating inclusive and equitable learning experiences. Both theorists and designers can use their skills and knowledge to create accessible and culturally responsive learning environments. This topic also covers the ethical and legal obligations of learning designers in creating inclusive learning experiences.
3. **Designing for accessibility:** This textbook will also focus on the importance of designing for accessibility to ensure that all learners can access and engage with the learning material. It will provide practical strategies for designing learning experiences that are accessible, such as using clear and concise language, providing alternative text for images and videos, and creating content that is compatible with assistive technologies.
4. **Designing for equity:** Learning designers are also required to design experiences that promote equitable learning outcomes. This book will consider how to design in this way, with a focus on assessments that are fair and inclusive, such as using multiple forms of assessment and providing opportunities for feedback and revision. Attention will also be paid to creating a learning environment that is supportive and fosters a sense of belonging for all learners.
5. **Designing for cultural responsiveness:** This topic provides practical strategies for learning designers to design learning experiences that are culturally responsive. It

explores the importance of acknowledging cultural differences and creating learning experiences that are relevant to diverse learners. It covers strategies for incorporating cultural responsiveness into the learning design process, such as incorporating culturally relevant examples and incorporating the learners' cultural background into the learning experience.

6. **Implementation and evaluation:** This theme will address the implementation and evaluation of inclusive learning design. Strategies for implementing inclusive learning design, such as providing training to educators and using feedback from learners to improve the learning experience, will be examined. Strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive learning design, such as using formative and summative evaluation methods and collecting feedback from learners, will also be explored.

About the chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction (Keith Heggart)

This chapter begins by considering why there is a need for a book such as this, especially in the Australasian context. It recognises the increasing diversity and expectations within and upon universities, including the need to cater for a more diverse student cohort. The central role played by learning designers and similar is then presented, and their importance is discussed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the book and a brief biography of each of the contributors.

Chapter 2: Making socially just pedagogy a reality (Keith Heggart and Camille Dickson-Deane)

This chapter examines the concept of socially just learning

design. It begins by describing both how and why socially just learning design is important in the current higher education context, before suggesting a framework that learning designers can adopt in order to ensure that their work is socially just. This framework combines elements of Universal Design for Learning, Nancy Fraser's three dimensions of social justice and David Wiley's ideas about open education into a cohesive approach to designing learning experiences that are socially just. In the final section of this chapter, a number of examples that make use of the framework are presented.

Chapter 3: Designing inclusive learning experience through Open Educational Practices (Mais Fatayer)

This chapter serves as a guide for learning designers seeking to integrate Open Educational Practices (OEP) into their work. Drawing on both theoretical frameworks and practical insights, the chapter emphasises the role of OEP in advancing social justice within higher education. Through extensive experience in learning design and open education, the author outlines how OEP can reduce barriers, democratise education, foster community, and enhance the student learning experience. Despite the potential benefits, the chapter acknowledges prevalent challenges hindering the widespread adoption of OEP in learning design practices, including lack of awareness, concerns about quality and intellectual property, and inadequate infrastructure. However, the chapter elaborates on the argument that learning designers, equipped with their unique skills and positions, play a pivotal role in driving the integration of OEP into educational settings.

Chapter 4: Negotiating the assumptions and identity tensions surrounding third space academics/professionals (Puva P Arumugam)

This chapter outlines the perceptions of identity and assumptions surrounding the role of third space academics/

professionals. It also considers the tensions and challenges faced by third space academics/professionals. It concludes by discussing the adaptations and adjustments made by third space academics/professionals.

Chapter 5: Indigenous-led learning design: Reimagining the teaching team (Katrina Thorpe, Shaun Bell and Susan Page)

This chapter outlines the authors' approach to developing a highly successful Indigenous-led microcredential, *Supervising Indigenous Higher Degree Research*. It highlights the role of collaboration, which hinges on three key factors: (1) the importance of trust; (2) the value of conversation and iteration; and (3) the strength of a multidisciplinary team. Through reflecting on the creative synergy which propelled the teaching development, the authors have reimagined the composition of a teaching team beyond the traditional academic model. The authors offer recommendations for educators/learning designers undertaking work in Indigenous-led learning design collaborations.

Chapter 6: Designing for equity in learning (John Vulic)

This chapter highlights Indigenous disadvantage across the subjects of Math and Science, a common disadvantage that occurs in many countries. In response to this, it introduces ways learning designers can create well-designed learning environments to provide students opportunities to learn the skills and abilities that will set them up for success in school, career and life. The chapter documents a case study of teachers redesigning their Math curriculum with a focus on promoting executive function skills to allow students to take control of their own learning. Finally, the chapter unpacks practical ways learning designers can design and promote the development of skill sets, including the ability to pay attention and ignore distractions, keep track of ideas in one's head and think flexibly to solve problems.

Chapter 7: Designing for cultural responsiveness (Nhung Nguyen)

This chapter discusses cultural responsiveness in education. It explores practical strategies to design for cultural responsiveness (e.g., incorporating culturally relevant examples and incorporating the learners' cultural background into the learning experience) and provides specific examples of incorporating cultural responsiveness into the learning design process such as designing learning materials using artefacts that reflect cultural diversity and/or inviting Māori and Pacific/Indigenous experts to get involved in different stages of the learning design process. The experts can work collaboratively with the team to brainstorm a course plan (an outline of the content, assessment and learning activities), writing some sections of a course, design some learning activities and assessment tasks and/or review content and assessments.

Chapter 8: Working with students with lived experience of disability to enhance inclusive and accessible learning (Katie Duncan and Rhiannon Hall)

This chapter documents the importance of working with students to understand their requirements. The chapter uses the *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* video project as an example of how to use co-design to engage with students. The chapter also looks at other inclusive design approaches that aim to improve the experience for all students and ensure that no one is disadvantaged.

Chapter 9: Baking a cake: Engaging staff in inclusive learning design (Bruna Contro Pretero)

This chapter examines how learning designers and associated professionals can work more productively with other members of the course teams. It uses the analogy of baking a cake to show the importance of planning, preparing different

materials, consulting all stakeholders and then serving the finished cake – and highlights examples of how each of these contributes to the successful implementation of a course.

Chapter 10: Conclusion (Mais Fatayer)

The final chapter draws together the various case studies into advice for developing learning designers to adopt in their practice.

About the author



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Keith Heggart is the academic lead for the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design at UTS, where he developed an innovative course combining microcredentials and work-integrated learning. This course received the AECT Learning Innovation Award in 2022 and a UTS Teaching and Learning Citation. Keith's research focuses on social justice and learning design, earning him awards such as the Best Publication from AECT and the Early Career Researcher award from ASCILITE. He has over 20 publications, including two books, and is an Apple Distinguished Educator.