Task Engagement in Higher Education

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What Is a Task?

A Task...

• Supports a clear goal
• Provides a process for meeting goals
• Provides a specific beginning and end

Activity

Any classroom event or action
Engagement is the level of involvement in a task, ranging from not involved at all to complete absorption.

This involvement can be behavioral, cognitive, and/or emotional.
Why Focus On Task Engagement?

1. Task engagement can decrease the effect of external variables on student outcomes.

(Christenson & Reschly, 2013; Fraser, 1986)
Why Focus On Task Engagement? (cont.)

2. Task engagement can lead to greater learner achievement.

(Christenson & Reschly, 2013; Csikszentmihályi, 2014)
The Six Characteristics of Engaging Tasks

• Based on the literature
• Change according to student, task, and context
• Supported by technology

"Levi at computer" by kathleenleavitt is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Six Characteristics of Engaging Tasks

1. The task is **interesting**.  
   (excites curiosity, is appealing)

2. The task is **authentic** to learners.  
   (has real life value)

3. There are opportunities for **social interaction**.  
   (communication with other people)
Six Characteristics of Engaging Tasks (cont.)

4. There is a **challenge/skills balance**. (the task is neither too difficult nor too easy)

5. **Autonomy and structure** are balanced. (learners have as much freedom as they need; they can make choices)

6. **Support** and **feedback** are immediate and useful. (include resources, peer and expert feedback)
Engaging Task Example: Green Screen Videos

Green screen technology allows teachers to use, or students to present, in fictional environments. Learners can use their tablets, phones, or a digital video camera to film.

Three steps to Video Production:

Plan
Create
Publish
Planning with Storyboards

"Storyboards" by Indy Trendy Skits is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0

"Student Storyboard" by mrmayo is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0
Creating the Video

Green screen videos are filmed in front of a green background. “Actors” should not wear green unless this is a purposeful creative decision.
Editing

Using software such as the free OpenShot Video Editor, the green background is replaced with a photo or video.
OpenShot Details

For a detailed look at the OpenShot editor, please visit the OpenShot Quick Tutorial
Publish

To view student projects that employed OpenShot Video Editor, please visit the following links:

• Fall 2018 Tech Ed
• A Trip Around the Globe
Big Picture

Characteristics of engaging tasks, integrated throughout the task and supported by appropriate technology use, can lead to learner achievement.
List of References


Course Design for Student Success

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To Do List

• What is UDL?
• Why is UDL important?
• Course Design
• UDL Principles
  • Representation
  • Engagement
  • Action and Expression
• Examples
UDL: At a Glance

• “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed.

• This approach offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know.

• Developing lesson plans this way helps all [students] . . .”

(Morin, n.d.)
Why is UDL important?

The students in our classes . . .

• Have diverse social identities
  • Race/ethnicities, genders, religions, abilities, sexual orientations, ages, abilities, socioeconomic standing

• Prefer choice
  • Curriculum, content, instructional methods, study materials, class schedule

• Are digital natives
  • Social, tech-savvy

• Have constant need to be connected
  • Disruptive, arriving late and leaving early, not attending class at all

(Ouellett, 2004, p. 137; Dean, Lee-Post, & Hapke, 2017, p. 6.)
Course Design Blueprint

1. Identifying essential course components
2. Examine the learning environment
3. Identifying challenges to student success
4. Selecting and implementing diverse instructional methods
Identifying Essential Course Components

*i.e., skills, knowledge, attitudes students must demonstrate*

Key areas:

- Core content, principles, concepts, learning goals
- Academic skills
- Values or attitudes
- Level of proficiency students must demonstrate to complete the course

(Ouellett, 2004, p. 138)
Identify the Learning Goal

Re-write course outcomes/objectives using phrases that fit within the UDL framework.

• Read
• Listen
• Write
• Speak
• Manipulate Calculations
• Remember concepts
• Remember procedures
• Solve Problems

• Take in information
• Express information
• Demonstrate understanding of processes
• Demonstrate understanding of concepts and ideas
• Show what they know through personally accessible formats
• Create a representation of what they know
Examine the Learning Environment

- Curriculum expectations
- Social and behavioral expectations
- Interventions
- Technologies
- Assessment strategies
- Classroom layout

(Salend & Whittaker, 2017, p. 61)
Identifying Challenges to Student Success

• How is content, learning activities and materials, directions, and academic language presented?
• How do students demonstrate what they know and can do?
• How are students’ attention, involvement, and motivation fostered and maintained?

(Salend & Whittaker, 2017, pp. 61-62)
Selecting and Implementing Diverse Instructional Methods

• Use research-based instructional practices, accommodations, technologies, and policies that offer appropriate supports and challenges to students

• Multiple means of
  • Representation
  • Action and expression
  • Engagement

(Salend & Whittaker, 2017, p. 62)
Representation

• Perception
  • visual and auditory information

• Language and symbols
  • vocabulary, symbols, syntax, structure, language
  • use multiple media

• Comprehension
  • patterns, big ideas, relationships, background knowledge

(CAST, 2018)
Representation (cont.)
Engagement

• Recruiting interest
  • Choice, autonomy, relevance

• Sustaining perception and persistence
  • Varied demands and resources (tools, degree of difficulty, scaffolds, emphasize process)
  • Collaboration and community

• Self regulation
  • Opportunities for self-reflection and goal setting

(CAST, 2018)
Ways to Engage Students

(Picture courtesy of WSU Tri-Cities, 2019)
Ways to Engage Students (cont.)
More Ways to Engage Students
Cartoonist, James Stevenson: Fair Selection

FOR A FAIR SELECTION EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE CLIMB THAT TREE
Action and Expression

• Physical action
  • Methods for response and navigation, access to tools and technology

• Expression and communication
  • Multiple media for communication (composing, physical manipulatives, social media and web tools)
  • Tools for composition and construction (spellcheck, prompts, text-to-speech, graphic organizers, sentence starters)

• Executive functions
  • Guide goal-setting, support planning

(CAST, 2018)
Student Actions and Expressions
UDL Example in Higher Education

To see examples of how UDL can be implemented in a variety of courses visit [UDL ON CAMPUS: UDL Examples](UDL_ON_CAMPUS:_UDL_Examples)
Benjamin Franklin on How To Educate

Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.

*Benjamin Franklin*
Reference List

- CAST (2018). *Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.2*. To see where this information was retrieved from, please visit CAST: The UDL Guidelines


- Morin, A. (n.d.). Universal design for learning (UDL): What you need to know. To see where this information was retrieved from, please visit Universal Design for Learning (UDL): What You Need to Know.


• UDL On Campus. (n.d.). *UDL examples: Examples in higher education*. To see where this information was retrieved from, please visit [UDL ON CAMPUS: UDL Examples](#).

• To view WSU Tri-Cities October 15, 2019 twitter post, please visit [WSU Tri-Cities on Twitter](#).
Motivating Students

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Expectancy Theory

To view the expectancy theory, please visit Motivation Theories by Operational Excellence Consulting, slide twenty.
Students’ Valence Questions

- Do I care about the outcomes/consequences? How big is the reward? How harsh is the punishment?
  - Is this assignment/activity a significant portion of the grade?
  - Does my prof seem to care if I do it or not?
  - Do I need to know this for the exam or paper?
  - Will I need to know this in subsequent courses?
  - Is this subject something I can use in real life?
Students’ Instrumentality Questions

Are there consequences for doing as I’m asked?

• If I succeed will I be rewarded?
  – If I score “good” on the rubrics, will my grade be higher? Or does everyone get A’s (or C’s)?
  – If I speak up in class (or even attend), will my grade be higher?
  – If I attend class, will lecture material be on the exam?
  – If I read the text, will it be on the exam?
  – If I don’t read the text, will I not be able to follow lecture?
  – If put in the extra effort to write well on the assignment, will the prof notice, grade it, or provide me feedback?
  – Is there added value for going to class?
Students’ Instrumentality Questions (cont.)

Are there consequences for doing as I’m asked?

• If I fail/misbehave, will I be punished?
  – If nobody answers the prof’s question, will we experience uncomfortable silence (or will prof answer own question)?
  – If I cheat, will I be caught? If I’m caught, will the prof actually grade me down, or report me?
  – If I don’t show up to group meetings, will my group grade really be any different?
The Job Characteristics Model

Core Job Characteristics
- Critical Psych State
- Outcome

Skill Variety Task Identity Task Significance
- Experienced meaningfulness of work
- Motivation

Autonomy
- Experienced responsibility
- Satisfaction

Feedback from Task
- Knowledge of results
- Effectiveness
How to Design a Course Based on JCM

• Increase Skill Variety
  – Go beyond one-way lectures and m-c exams; add exercises, role-plays, cases, discussion, videos, essays, projects

• Increase Task Significance
  – Sell the topic/skills to students as something they need in life
  – Have them apply topic to own life (e.g., personal case analysis)
How to Design a Course Based on JCM (cont.)

• Increase Task Identity & Autonomy both by:
  – Let students pick topic for assignment
  – Avoid group projects

• Provide Feedback
  – Turnaround graded work *quickly*
    ○ i.e., at least before next similar assignment is due
  – Mark up papers significantly
  – Show what correct exam answers are