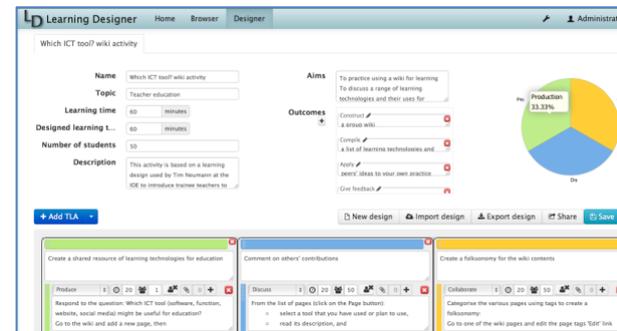# The Learning Designer

Figure 1: Designer screen

What is the Learning Designer?

The Learning Designer is web-based tool to help in the creation and sharing of learning designs (e.g. lesson plans) and to support the integration of learning technology. A learning design is displayed as the sequence of activities you have created, similar to a lesson plan, and shows all its main properties you have designed in, such as topic, number of students, aims, outcomes, duration of the learning time and the type of learning involved. Since the tool is online, you can choose to share your learning designs with your colleagues, and view and adapt learning designs that have been shared by others. You can find the tool at learningdesigner.org.

Where can I find out how to use the Learning Designer?

We have created a video guide to the Learning Designer that you can view on the LearningDesignerCommunity YouTube channel along with a further playlist of video tutorials. You can find the introductory video at Step 1.12 of Week 1 of Blended Learning Essentials: Embedding Practice, our MOOC created for the Vocational Education and Training sector.

How can the Learning Designer be used in learning and teaching?

The Learning Designer helps you design learning experiences as sequences of teaching and learning activities (TLAs) that will help your learners move towards the learning outcomes you define.

At the top of the screen (Fig 1) you can specify your teaching aims and outcomes, which you can categorise according to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives. The Learning Designer then supports you in designing the teaching and learning activities that will enable learners to meet those outcomes.

In the lower part of the screen (Fig 1) you can add the sequence of TLAs that make up the full session you are designing. This could be a single classroom session, or a series of TLAs that begin with student preparation, classroom activities, small group work, then individual follow-up – whatever you believe it takes to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

On the Designer screen you first Add TLA, a blank panel to which you can Add Learning Activity, as many as you need for this first part of the session (Fig 2). For each one you can select from a drop-down list of six learning types that best describes each activity you create: is it learning from

acquisition (Read/Watch/Listen)? Learning from inquiry? Learning from practice? Learning from production? Learning from discussion? Or learning from collaboration?
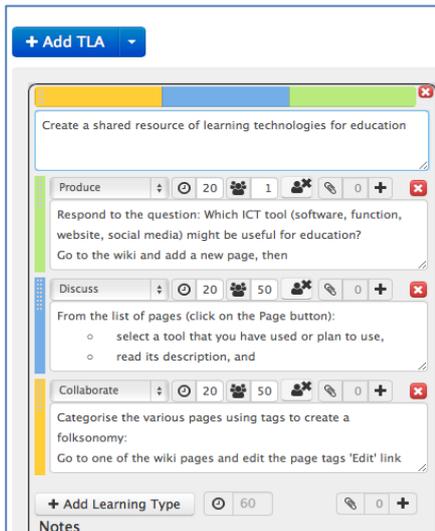

Fig 2: A TLA with Learning Activities added and defined.

These learning types are drawn from Laurillard's "Conversational Framework" (2012) – a model of what the teacher needs to put in place for learners to learn. Laurillard (2012) argues that learning requires successive cycles of interaction to take place between teachers and learners, and learners and their peers, and between their concepts and practice. The intended learning outcomes are promoted by the optimal combination of the six learning types.

For each Learning Activity you then specify the duration in minutes, the group size (1 for an individual activity, or the size for small group or whole class), whether the teacher is present or not, whether it is online or not, and what resource is to be attached. This helps you take account of the entire learning experience, not just what happens when the tutor is present. You can type into the Activity the guidance to the student on what they are to do

The Learning Designer will add up the learning time as you work, so you can check you are not asking the learners to do too much, which is critical to maintaining their motivation.
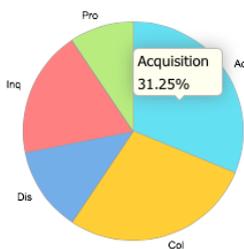
Analysing learning

The Learning Designer creates a dynamic pie-chart showing the nature of the overall learning experience you have created so you can see at a glance whether or not this is the type of overall learning experience you feel is appropriate.

You can then make adjustments in just a few clicks e.g. change the type of learning and activity description, change the amount of time on an activity, change the group size, add a different resource, or even move the activity to a different TLA. This supports the well-established iterative reflective design approach used across all areas of education and training.

Fig 3: Pie-chart showing the proportion of study time spent on the 6 types of learning

Using technology effectively

The Learning Designer encourages the effective use of technology in teaching and learning by helping you make explicit what kind of learning is required. The learning type identified helps you decide which tool would be most appropriate to use. For example, tools such as wikis or shared documents can be used to facilitate collaboration and production, while 'forums' or the 'comment' function in blogs can facilitate discussion.

The Learning Designer enables you to attach links to digital tools or Open Educational Resources (OERs) anywhere on the web. For example, a presentation on SlideShare could be attached to a Read/Watch/Listen activity; a curation tool such as Scoop.it! could be attached to an Investigation activity; a Google Doc could be attached to a Production activity.

Checking your design

As you develop the design the pie-chart and the Designed Learning Time both update dynamically, so you can keep checking.

You can also use the Analysis tab at the top of the screen to check further representations of the learning experience. Alongside the pie-chart this also shows the proportion of student time spent on individual, group and classwork, f2f vs online, and the proportion of teacher presence/absence.

This can also act as a check on whether you have remembered to assign data correctly for each activity. For example, if you think you have a balanced pie-chart, a lot of teacher presence and a wholly online session, but this feedback shows a large proportion of one learning type, a low proportion of teacher presence, and a lot of f2f time, it suggests you need to check the data input.

Sharing designs

The Learning Designer helps build community knowledge in effective teaching practice by allowing teachers to share their best ideas with other teachers. Each user of the Learning Designer has their own Personal Space where your designs are saved.

To move your designs into your Public Space so that others can see them:

- Click on the design
- Click the little box on the right
- Click the bookmark icon at the top: this opens a contents list
- Click the Public space option: it tells you it has been moved, so that others can see it.

You can share your learning designs with your colleagues and learners even if they are not logged into the Learning Designer by sending them a link and the tool will provide a shortened url if you click on the Share icon in the Designer view. You can also Export your learning design as a MS Word document for editing, printing or sharing (Fig 4).

Fig 4: Ways of sharing designs

You can also borrow from others, by using the Browser screen to find designs of interest to you. When you click on one, it opens in the Designer, where you can inspect it, or click "Turn editing on" to adapt it for your own context.

Adapting learning designs

The Browser screen lists the learning designs that have been made public. Some have been assigned to specific categories. To see all of them, click 'View designs as a list', where you can search on keywords.

When you click on a design and view it in the Designer screen, you can edit and adapt it if you 'Turn editing on'. Then it becomes one of your designs, stored in your My Designs section, along with a note of its origin. You can then edit everything in that design.

Learning Designer FAQs

Q: I have registered for Learning Designer and signed up, but not received an email.

> A: There are a number of initial reasons to check why you have not received an email.

Please check the confirmation email has not been accidentally marked and caught up as spam email if you or your provider have this function. The registration email from Learning Designer is sent via a Google Mail account ld.lkl.ac.uk@gmail.com

It is worth checking you are using the most recent version of a recommended web browser such as Firefox or Chrome.

Check whether your email and/or password do not use alpha-numerics that are non-standard characters of UK/US English. Unfortunately, the Learning Designer user system is not able to handle these.

Q. How can I transfer the Learning Designer design into my VLE?

At present the transfer of the code to the VLE has some remaining technical difficulties. The export to Word enables you to copy and paste the instructions and urls into the appropriate Moodle (or other) components. We hope to resolve the technical difficulties soon.