



Frame Your Design Challenge

What is the problem you're trying to solve?

Today in academia, adult learning theory isn't always effectively employed. This can mean disenchantment with higher ed, as well as a disconnect between education and its application in the real world (what some might argue is the whole premise of higher ed—to prepare students for the real world). One potential solve would be to create more vocational institutions, but this runs the risk of siloing thinkers and eliminating diversity of thought and experience in academic environments

1) Take a stab at framing it as a design question.

How might we use innovations in technology to enhance the applicability of learnings to a student's desired career?

2) Now state the ultimate impact you're trying to have.

Ideally, I'm creating a solution that makes vague and abstract curriculum and theories immediately applicable to real-world challenges that students will have in their projected careers. This will solve new employer expectations coming out of higher ed, like portfolio work.

3) What are some possible solutions to your problem?

Think broadly. It's fine to start a project with a hunch or two, but make sure you allow for surprising outcomes.

*Using VR or interactive video like Interlude to "choose-your-own-adventure" after an all-class comprehensive lesson
Forming project teams to address challenges (might require telecommuting to find comprehensive teams)
Chunking work throughout the semester to be in service of an annual thesis instead of disparate exercises and assignments
Engaging employers to teach classes or sections of classes, in conjunction with project challenges and required internships*

4) Finally, write down some of the context and constraints that you're facing.

They could be geographic, technological, time-based, or have to do with the population you're trying to reach.

The biggest risk seems to be in terms of execution—how to create a personalized learning experience that doesn't eliminate the benefits of a group learning experience. Depending on the mode of education delivery, there might be issues like lack of collaboration through video or how to breach geographical boundaries if team members are dispersed. There's also the risk that students do not know what they want until several years into higher ed or even into work experience, so there would have to be support and alternatives for those still exploring.

5) Does your original question need a tweak? Try it again.

How might we use innovations in technology to enhance the applicability of learnings to a student's desired career, without isolating them in that choice or forcing them down a path too early, or eliminating intellectual curiosity and exposure to diversity?