

ABC

Learning Design

Active, blended, connected and beyond



Edited by

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackleford-Cesare

 **UCLPRESS**

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Foreword

Why should there be a broad readership for a book about learning design? It is surely an activity that every teacher in a university or college has been honing throughout their career.

The editors explain its origin as an initiative on how programmes of study should be redesigned, as a response to the university's vision statement: 'to transform how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared and the way that global problems are solved'. At the same time, the world is undergoing the rapid changes that digital innovation brings, and teaching must be transforming itself as well.

How can we manage this pressure for pedagogic and digital innovation when teacher workload is already high and research is underfunded and subsidised by teaching? Teachers and education practitioners of all kinds need help.

This book is for practitioners who recognise the value of innovation and are open to the means to achieve it, realistically. The capability of learning design is not given through the experience of mastering a subject. It may be learned over time, and with time teachers certainly learn a lot from their students about how to teach – if they are open to that. University leadership recognises the need for teacher professional development, but it is rarely a priority, and central support has to manage very tight budgets.

So the pressing need is for a practical, efficient approach to give every teacher the support that allows them to develop new expertise, fit for a world now dominated in every profession by the need to embrace and optimise digital methods. The curriculum must change in every subject area to prepare students for that world of work, and the pedagogy

must change to ensure the most efficient use of teacher and learner time, to create the optimal learning experience.

Learning design is the activity teachers use to work out what it takes for a learner to achieve the intended learning outcomes. These are defined in the curriculum to enable prospective students to understand where the course will take them. It is the teacher's responsibility to guide them from where they are, intellectually, to where they need to be as a graduate in that field. This book works at the three different levels of description of that journey, from the overarching programme to the component modules, to the series of sessions that guide the student through the cognitive activities they need to undertake. These will be in class, in a group, as an individual, on campus or online, in the field or at home, synchronous or asynchronous, using human, material or digital resources. This is how the teacher nurtures their students' cognitive and emotional development in their chosen field. They are creating a highly complex interaction for every student, within their university or college environment, over days, weeks, months and years.

The ABC Learning Design workshop defines the practice of how this can be done. At its heart is a collaborative methodology that supports the creativity and ambition of the teachers aiming to build that productive student learning experience. The model worked so well for academic colleagues at UCL that the editors were encouraged to offer it to other institutions. The book tells the story of how the immediate appreciation of this simple, quick and pedagogically effective workshop format built up to an internationally known and valued methodology for high quality learning design for students.

It is vital that we understand how to optimise the value of both teacher and student time in the interactions that constitute the overall learning experience, especially when the opportunities and risks have accelerated so fast with the incorporation of GenAI into how teachers and students work. Expenditure on teacher time is a significant cost but will not increase while 'higher education providers across the UK are facing some of the most significant financial headwinds in recent times'.¹ So we must husband that precious resource very carefully.

The evidence-based guidance and effective practices that the ABC Learning Design workshop has developed, over several years, in collaboration with so many dedicated teachers, will be a delight for those keen to innovate realistically. The editors have assembled an engaging collection of perspectives on how to design for learning using the ABC method, from different types of institution from a dozen different countries. The appendices provide the templates themselves, which

enable institutions to adopt and adapt as they wish and to localise the workshop resources.

The focus on fundamental principles of collaboration, value, localisation, quality and usability runs through every part of the book. It is a generous and deeply thought-through contribution to enabling the teaching community to achieve all its ambitions to develop itself and the world, in all its new and challenging complexity.

Diana Laurillard
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Note

1 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2025/06/12/student-academic-experience-survey-2025/>.

Introduction

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

ABC (active, blended, connected) Learning Design, also sometimes known as ABC LD, is an innovative rapid development method to help educators design programmes, modules,¹ and short courses. ABC was created specifically to address the constraints of time and resources commonly found in universities and colleges. The concept originated at UCL as a practical and efficient alternative to time and resource intensive ‘instructional design’ methodologies. Using a facilitated workshop structure, academic teams work collaboratively in short, high-energy sessions, to storyboard visual course outlines that align with institutional and student-focused learning goals. ABC aims specifically to tackle the well-recognised challenge to engage and support time-poor faculty members and help them to build educationally rich blended and online courses.

This book has been written for both teachers and educational support colleagues. We realise some will be completely new to learning design but others may be experienced users of ABC and similar structured design processes. Although the focus is on ABC, the wider aim of this book is to reflect on the institutional and educational value of such frameworks, the challenge of introducing them at scale and their potential impact as tools for strategic change. Our initiatives with ABC may illustrate some of the challenges of trying to implement new educational approaches in complex and diverse institutions. The adaptable and flexible nature of ABC, however, was built-in to try to mitigate some of these specific factors, enabling institutions worldwide to integrate the method into their various strategic and pedagogical initiatives, and as we shall see, extending its role beyond straightforward course design.

The need for an updated approach to learning design had become increasingly apparent from the early 2020s, as mainstream universities

and colleges began to explore additional flexible, interactive and consistent learning options for their students. To ensure the active engagement of students in distance and hybrid teaching formats, meticulous preplanning of the whole learner experience is essential. A pivot, from a teacher to a student perspective, is thus required, implying a rather nuanced understanding of the nature of remote learning.

Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when distance provision became an urgent requirement, institutions discovered a real constraint. Mainstream teaching staff often lacked the essential design skills and time to effectively redesign their programmes to operate in the (for many) new mode. Even experienced, skilled and successful classroom-based teachers found the switch challenging and stressful. As a result, an influential Horizon report in 2022 called for institutions to ‘focus on developing sound hybrid and online pedagogies and investing in additional staff and services in the areas of instructional design and faculty development’ (Pelletier et al. 2022, 7). The same year, JISC, the authoritative UK digital education body at the time, identified that: ‘curriculum frameworks/models, design principles and learning and teaching values are increasingly recognised as key mechanisms to drive changes in, and support for, curriculum and learning design processes’ (MacNeill and Beetham 2022). To achieve significant institutional change on a large scale, both reports highlighted the need to engage mainstream academics. However, old-style frameworks of redesigning programmes usually require a daunting amount of academic staff time and support resources.

Since its inception in 2014, ABC has offered a radical and popular alternative to traditional instructional design-style and ad hoc curriculum design methods. Interest grew quickly across the UK and Europe, facilitated by its release as a downloadable toolkit, under a Creative Commons licence. According to a study conducted by JISC in 2022 on UK curriculum and learning design in higher education, the ABC model featured in 32 of 79 responses, and 40 per cent of the open text comments ‘mentioned using ABC or an adaptation of it’ (MacNeill and Beetham 2022). ABC had already been the focus of a significant Erasmus+ project, led by UCL and including universities and colleges across Europe (see [Chapter 1](#) ‘Introducing ABC Learning Design’ and an account of the project evaluation of ABC (in [Appendix 2](#)). The idea for this book arose when it was observed that ABC was being implemented and adapted, for example, to design training courses (Verdaguer 2022), facilitate a change in the local online learning platform (Marstio 2020), and had even spread to the secondary-school

sector (Waite 2020). ABC was also being used to quality assure not just new programmes, but also existing ones, in particular to avoid overlap in course content across a programme.

In this book we identify several reasons for the rapid uptake of ABC. One absolutely critical factor is that ABC is based on the well-respected pedagogic theory of Diana Laurillard's Conversational Framework (2002; 2012) and particularly her key concept of 'learning types'. The heart of ABC, however, is a facilitated and structured workshop enabling academic teams to work collaboratively to produce visual storyboards that represent students' learning journeys. Building on this sound pedagogical framework and a set of key participatory principles, over time ABC's openness, ease of use and adaptability have enabled adoption in a wide range of educational contexts, now beyond its origins in tertiary education.

Through several collaborative initiatives and countless discussions with members of the international tertiary education community, the UCL team realised that although all universities and colleges face much the same learning design and change management challenges, the culture and context of each institution are unique. The methodology has therefore been 'localised' or adapted to varying local settings and requirements, and in the process its scope has sometimes expanded from a primary focus on blended learning design. Although ABC had been initially envisaged as a simple standalone learning design intervention, in practice it was being widely used as an institutional change 'tool', to align with and facilitate specific institutional strategies. In many cases ABC is used as an instrument to engage with broader issues, such as faculty engagement, staff development and organisational change. This cross-institutional adaptability underscores ABC's potential to create a shared design language, enabling faculty and students alike to engage more deeply with structured learning principles.

Typical areas where ABC has been used, as reported from the community, are as follows (ABC Learning Design 2020):

- **Learning design:** design of blended courses, programmes, MOOCs, professional development and training, and facilitating student input into learning design.
- **Assessment design:** review of assessment and feedback activities across a programme.
- **Strategic development:** implementation of strategic initiatives such as research-based learning, digital capabilities, employability and accessibility.

- **Academic development:** integrated into existing courses and practical skills sessions, the common language encouraging sharing of practice and case studies.
- **Change or review of technical and support environment:** introduction of a new virtual learning environment (VLE), digital tools review and analysis of service provision.
- **Quality assurance:** part of new and existing module/programme design and review.
- **Analytics:** identification of data points for ‘in-flight’ feedback and post hoc review.
- **Digital capabilities for staff and students:** alignment with institutional or external skills frameworks.

By necessity, institutions focus on different elements according to their priorities. Those with strong strategic learning design initiatives tend to use ABC much as originally intended. In places without this type of central strategic integration, it tends to be introduced as an ad hoc or localised initiative (at departmental level, for example), or promoted centrally via academic development. As we shall see in the case studies in the book, the method is versatile enough to be implemented by a small educational support team or as part of a larger institutional change initiative.

In the decade since its launch, therefore, we see ABC being reframed as more than simply a set of plug-and-play guides and resources for learning design. The flexibility to include diverse and localised adaptations has not only enabled transferability but also alignment with wider institutional initiatives, teaching practice and professional support structures. The UCL team felt 10 years of practice offered a timely opportunity to interrogate the values, scope and implementation of the original method. All institutional adopters of ABC seem to have retained and built their modifications around the fundamental workshop and storyboard approach, and it is useful to reflect on which factors are seen as essential, not only to inform practice around ABC, but any other curriculum design methods. The continuing commonality and cohesion provide a useful lingua franca that helps support professionals and faculty to share ideas and practice within and between institutions. This book includes the experiences of a range of international contributors, many of whom have been working with ABC for many years, and has provided an excellent opportunity to collate different user perspectives and explore both the challenges as well as success factors of the original approach. Included in the Appendices is a full ‘recipe’ for the classic

room-based ABC workshop (Appendix 1), an account of a large transnational evaluation of ABC (Appendix 2) and a description of the ABC tool wheel (Appendix 3), developed at UCL to help educators pick learning technologies that are supported locally. The glossary provided in Michou et al. 2025 will hopefully help to navigate some of the technical terms used in the book.

In Chapter 1, ‘Introducing ABC Learning Design’, we explore the practice and underlying philosophy of ABC as a curriculum design methodology, emphasising its ability to facilitate structured, collaborative planning. We emphasise how openness and ‘localisation’ were built-in from the beginning, adding to its value in a wide range of scenarios.

Chapter 2, ‘Embedding ABC Learning Design into programme development at UCL’, describes how ABC has been implemented in its home institution. The method has been gradually integrated into strategic, quality and support structures over the decade. We reflect how, even with an enthusiastic ABC team ‘in house’, introducing a structured learning design methodology at an institutional level, in a large and diverse, research-focused university, presents significant challenges, and we explore the various ways these obstacles have been addressed.

In Chapter 3, ‘Constructive alignment: institutional strategy for blended learning success’, we turn to a very different institution from UCL. VIVES University of Applied Sciences in Belgium was one of the first institutional adopters of ABC, outside the UK. Their case study provides valuable insight into how the method was strategically introduced to support blended learning, aligning with their systemic design framework.

ABC’s added value, beyond effective course design, is illustrated by Dublin City University, in Ireland. Chapter 4, ‘Enhancing reflection and inclusivity in teaching practice at two Irish universities’, explains how it has been implemented alongside the Universal Design for Learning accessibility framework, to help teachers reflect on how to enhance inclusivity as they design courses. Using ABC for reflection (with both staff and students) can identify areas for improvement in programmes and lead to actionable changes. The chapter offers practical resources and shares lessons learned from these implementations, making it especially valuable for those interested in applying ABC to aid critical reflection and inclusive practices.

Chapter 5, ‘One year later: tracing the impact of ABC on faculty development at Humanitas University’, outlines an analogous implementation, again focusing on ABC’s potential as a tool for reflective practice. Localising the workshop for this Italian university required

consideration of cultural dimensions (ethnic, local, academic and discipline-based) to ensure its effectiveness in specific contexts. The chapter considers how the long-term impact of an intervention like ABC may be measured.

Of course, the most widespread use of ABC is for the design of blended and fully online courses. A case study from UCL, [Chapter 6](#), ‘Adapting ABC for online learning design’, recounts how ABC can be integrated into established course design and development frameworks. It introduces the Learning Designer, a UCL-developed digital tool, often used alongside (or subsequent to) ABC, to help detail task-level design.

[Chapter 7](#), ‘Enhancing online learning at the University of Glasgow’, presents an operational approach to how ABC has been adopted at Glasgow to address strategic online initiatives. This chapter demonstrates how the original paper-based methodology was transferred to a digital format, and the steps undertaken afterwards to support teaching staff using the Glasgow variant.

[Chapter 8](#), ‘Digital asynchronous ABC for postgraduate teaching’, covers how ABC has been integrated into a postgraduate online module, teaching education professionals about learning design. In contrast with its original, real-time use with teaching staff, here ABC is unpacked to provide more room to articulate understanding at each step of the process, and in this way to explore educational theories and core assumptions around each step, in more detail. An outcome of this deconstruction approach is an appreciation of where exactly the ABC workshop steps sit, in the overall curriculum design process.

In supporting displaced educators with limited resources, the method’s simplicity has proved to be a significant benefit to practitioners. [Chapter 9](#), ‘An ABC of co-design methodology: collaborative professional learning in challenging environments’, explains how the collaborative design of online learning, in resource-constrained settings, can be facilitated, highlighting here its impact for empowering marginalised groups.

Although emerging from a higher education environment, ABC has been used effectively in other sectors. [Chapter 10](#), ‘ABC Learning Design in schools: scaling up professional development in learning design’, provides a fascinating example, scaling ABC for systemic change in the French school system, where it has supported teacher training and professional development.

One of the broader benefits of using the ABC framework is that it provides a cross-institutional shared design language. This important

aspect is highlighted in our final case study, in [Chapter 11](#), ‘The ABC-LD@4EU+ : enhanced version of the ABC Learning Design workshop tailored for the European University Alliance’s needs’, helping a transnational group of educators align pedagogy with strategic institutional goals.

In the Conclusion, we consider the reasons why ABC became a catalyst for innovation, in a wide variety of scenarios, and how it offers actionable insights for educators and institutions navigating the fast-evolving landscape of higher education and beyond.

Our intention for the book is to stimulate a global conversation on how we can work together to improve the design of learning experiences for the benefit of our educational establishments, teachers and students. It is hoped the book will help the international ABC community continue to grow and prosper. In a broader sense, the editors and contributors aim to encourage a transnational conversation about how we can work together to enhance learning design in all our institutions.

Note

- 1 In the UK, modules are generally awarded 15 or 30 credits for 12 or 24 weeks of study and form part of a programme leading to a specified qualification in a specified field of study (BA, MSc). This term may be used differently in different institutions and countries. Two UK credits equate to one European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credit.

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1

Introducing ABC Learning Design

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

ABC origins

ABC was created as a response to a specific pedagogical and institutional context. In 2014 UCL initiated a process of significant change, as departments began to discuss how programmes of study could be redesigned and developed to align with the university's new 2034 Vision (UCL 2014) and the parallel Connected Curriculum educational initiative (Fung 2017). In addition, there was growing use of digital resources, in particular media, and interest in facilitating innovative modes of study such as blended, flipped and distance learning. ABC's originators, Clive Young and Nataša Perović, realised that although these new modes were far more complex to design, the educational intentions, outcomes, activities and assessment would still need 'constructive alignment' (Biggs n.d.) in order to provide a cohesive and effective learning experience for students. To achieve this, a more systematic approach to curriculum design would have to be adopted. The team believed a structured, collaborative and dynamic workshop would be most effective (Figure 1.1).

Beetham (2012) had already identified a common obstacle in the sector, that 'practice and process had often been local, ad hoc, unexamined, and unresponsive to changing demands'. This was not the only issue. Nicol (2012) observed that 'curriculum design in higher education is not a formal activity and there is little support, formal or informal, provided in most higher education institutions to help academics become better at designing learning activities, modules and courses'. Clive and Nataša, therefore, began to investigate 'light touch' learning design approaches, looking for a method that could stimulate informed discussion about the principles of connected and flexible



Figure 1.1 At the heart of ABC is always a lively workshop.
Source: © Alejandro Salinas Lopez and UCL Educational Media 2019.

learning, maintain a practical, grounded focus and enable the rapid production of usable outcomes by busy teaching colleagues.

The ABC creators were not convinced that traditional step-by-step ‘instructional design’ methods, such as ADDIE (Learning Systems Institute 1975), derived from industrial training contexts, were particularly effective in a university setting. In their experience, such procedures had been found to be too prescriptive, inflexible and resource/time-consuming. Above all, they lacked UK universities’ avowed primary focus on enhancing the student experience. The approach Clive and Nataša preferred, therefore, was ‘learning design’, considered as a broader, more participatory process than instructional design. Learning design emphasises context and collaboration rather than standardised, templated methodologies. Teachers and support colleagues should be encouraged to work together to create, evaluate and enhance teaching and learning by using a flexible suite of pedagogical strategies, tools and resources. The core principles that Clive and Nataša wanted to include were visualisation, unobtrusive guidance and, above all, sharing of teachers’ experiences. Moreover, given the UCL support team’s limited resource and institutional authority (typical across the sector), they had to find an approach that was simple and quick to deliver, pedagogically effective and, above all, acceptable to hard-pressed and possibly sceptical academic colleagues.

The core values of ABC

The UCL team constructed a bespoke 90-minute workshop-based format, inspired by an earlier methodology called Viewpoints (2008–12). At the core of ABC is a signature in-person (and later online) workshop, facilitated by one or two moderators whose main role is to ensure the timely completion of the tasks, although they may also provide ad hoc pedagogic advice. In the ‘classic’ ABC session, small module teams work collaboratively around a table to create a visual ‘storyboard’ (Young and Perović 2016) of the new or existing module. At UCL, ABC workshops were originally run as pop-up sessions within departments. Organised locally and led by the module or programme lead, this decentralised model reduced the burden on the central team, boosted attendance and framed ABC as a routine academic activity. Since facilitators often don’t know in advance who will attend, no preparatory work is set, but it is expected that module teams will be familiar with the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of their module or programme.

Workshops usually last 90 minutes, for modules, or 120 minutes for full programmes. In programme-level sessions, core and optional module teams collaborate, guided by the programme leader, to address shared challenges like assessment diversity or accreditation changes.

Facilitators set up in advance with blank storyboards, worksheets and card sets. Each table represents a module or theme, with four participants per table ideal for productive discussion. Lone participants are paired or joined by others, and sometimes students contribute insights from recent experience.

The workshop begins with a short presentation on the Conversational Framework and its application in the ABC method. Most of the time, however, is spent on structured group work, with facilitators supporting timekeeping and clarification. Teams start by agreeing on a short, tweet-like strapline summarising the module or programme. They then sketch its current or intended shape, using a spider graph of the distribution of the learning types on a provided worksheet. The delivery blend, online/face-to-face is also noted.

Next, teams map learning types using postcard-sized cards on a provided storyboard timeline (Figure 1.3). The cards are then flipped to reveal example activities, which teams adapt or add to (Figure 1.4). They identify which activities are assessed, using silver and gold stars for formative and summative tasks (Figure 1.5).

Teams revisit their initial graphs to reflect on changes and may add stickers to highlight alignment with institutional themes, like



Figure 1.3 Module teams working with the learning types cards.
Source: © Editors.



Figure 1.4 The storyboard takes shape. *Source:* © Alejandro Salinas Lopez and UCL Educational Media, 2019.

employability, accessibility or digital capabilities. An action plan is created to assign follow-up tasks.

Finally, each team briefly presents its storyboard to the group, allowing for shared reflection on progression and strategy across the programme. Designs are photographed and can later inform module documentation, student journeys, or VLE content.

The resulting storyboard represents the students' learning journeys towards the module or programme learning outcomes. As the teams prototype the course design, participants consider at some depth the purpose, structure and outcomes of their existing or envisaged modules. Assessment strategies, cross-programme themes and institutional policies can then be addressed and aligned. More detailed description of the stages of the workshop can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Discussions on teaching techniques allow for the identification of, and agreement on, opportunities to improve the students' learning journey. Even among time-restricted academics, the sessions generate high levels of engagement, creative discussion and collective reflection on curriculum design. The method is flexible and non-prescriptive, building on the participants' existing practice.

The only pre-preparation attendees usually require is to familiarise themselves with relevant programme documentation, especially the

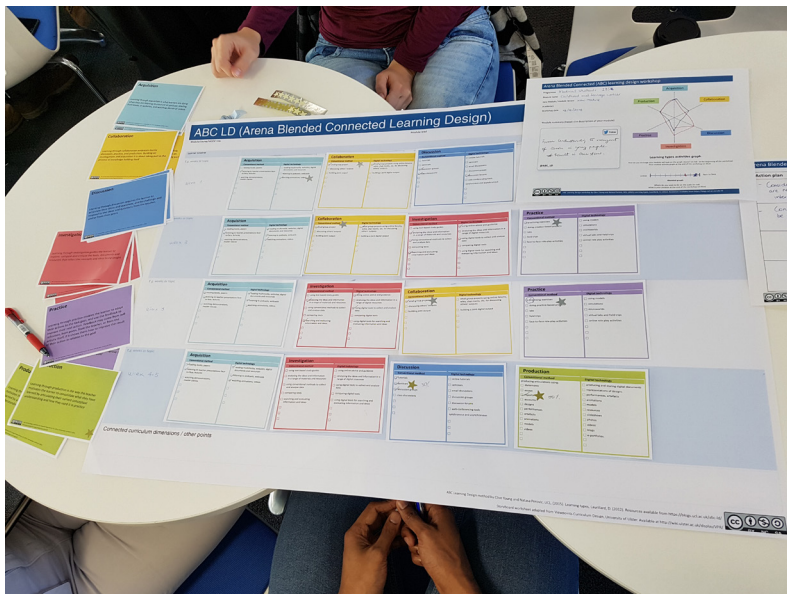


Figure 1.5 A completed storyboard. *Source:* © Editors.

learning outcomes and assessment plan. These specifications are often consulted by teams during the session. As the students' learning journey is laid out, proposals to change the nature, sequence and combination of activities are expected. Nonetheless, storyboarding with a peer group may equally rationalise and validate current designs and practices. Apart from the course-level design and prototyping work, this type of cooperative analysis and problem-solving could be used to address a more specific teaching task or issue and proved to be a valuable team-building exercise. Individuals can enjoy a (sometimes) rare opportunity to reflect on and share their own teaching practice with their departmental peers.

The workshop itself therefore was carefully configured, building in 10 core design principles:

- **Rapid prototyping:** design is iterative and at speed, facilitated in stages and with usable outputs at each cycle. The purpose is to evaluate its functionality, usability and alignment with the original specification. In an educational setting this 'specification' comprises the course aims and objectives, assessment plans, educational strategy and so on. Each cycle represents a different layer of abstraction of the course design, starting with a short 'tweet'-style descriptor, sketching the 'shape' of the course in terms of activity types and gradually zooming down into the details. Additional layers can always be added at this stage, for instance to integrate institutional strategies. When ABC was first formulated at UCL, for example, the module-level implementation of the Connected Curriculum strategy could be identified and reported on by simply attaching bespoke stickers to specific activities.
- **Collaborative and engaging:** academic teams work together, discussing pedagogic approaches and rationales, but have to agree on a shared approach in the time provided. There is a recognition here that there are few 'right answers' in curriculum planning and better optimal solutions often emerge through the exchange of ideas.
- **Visual representation:** the colourful visual and accessible representation of the students' learning journey is quickly 'readable' at each stage by all participants.
- **Student-centred and narrative-based:** the storyboard focusing on the students' learning journey, reinforces the notion that the design is a purposeful, discussable and transparent narrative describing the student experience over time.

- **Activity-based:** by moving away from a content focus (what to cover in the syllabus) active and participative learning designs are encouraged. This keystone ethos is embedded in the workshop structure itself, which can be envisaged as a form of ‘serious play’.
- **Democratic and informal:** no prior knowledge of learning design is required and everyone starts from the same point. With no ‘right answers’ and an emphasis on valuing ad hoc contribution and existing experiences, at UCL we tried to avoid any overt ‘staff development’ spin. In such a non-judgemental space, participants feel they have the permission to be creative and try new approaches.
- **Sound theoretical basis:** ABC operationalises a respected pedagogical model that would instil confidence in the resulting designs. (See the next section.)
- **Discipline-neutral:** ABC is applicable to any subject area and a variety of educational levels, from universities to schools and can serve as a cross-disciplinary shared terminology.
- **Scalable, transferable and flexible:** ABC is able to be adopted and adapted in a range of teaching and learning contexts and encompass local strategies and foci.
- **Open:** an open ethos was always hard baked into ABC’s philosophy, see the section ABC as an Open Educational Resource (OER).

ABC’s underpinning

A solid, simple and recognisable pedagogical foundation was essential to provide academic authority among teaching staff. Laurillard’s concept of ‘learning types’, derived from her Conversational Framework model of adult learning (Laurillard 2002; 2012) was chosen and operationalised as a card set. Her six learning types are: Acquisition (to read/watch/listen), Investigation, Practice, Discussion, Collaboration and Production. The printed card set, suggesting online and in-class activities helps participants recognise the application of the types in their own practice.

The straightforward and logical taxonomy resonates well with mainstream teaching practitioners and invariably stimulates rich pedagogical discussion, even for teachers with limited experience of (or enthusiasm for) educational theory. The robustness of Laurillard’s framework has now been demonstrated over hundreds of workshops in a wide range of disciplines. Behind the deceptive simplicity lies

a pedagogical richness derived from ‘conceptual learning, experiential learning, social constructivism, constructionism and collaborative learning, as well as the corresponding principles for designing teaching and learning activities in the constructional design literature’ (Laurillard 2012, 93). The Conversational Framework also ‘naturally’ focuses on learning activities and therefore encourages what Nicol (2012) recommended as an ‘educational rather than a content focus, a learning rather than a teaching focus’.

Even from the early piloting of ABC, ad hoc feedback from participants was almost invariably positive, but two formal evaluations of ABC were also commissioned in 2018 and 2020 (see also [Appendix 2](#)). Both found high levels of inter-institutional transferability, academic enthusiasm and satisfaction. The workshops appeared to inspire a degree of collaborative ‘educational design thinking’ in a variety of academic contexts. Design thinking in this context can be considered as ‘a non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test’ (Interaction Design Foundation 2016). Here are some examples of participant comments:

A surprisingly quick yet efficient way to view module/programme design: very practical and gave the opportunity to see it as a whole and at a glance, ensuring that a range of learning and assessments methods were incorporated.

Fantastic tool for visualising the course module which has led to reflection regarding the structure for different courses.

It’s very hands-on and the vibe somehow makes you feel very excited about implementing the ideas that the workshop generated.

Interestingly, the 2020 evaluation discovered that participants felt more confident as teachers after attending an ABC session (ABC Learning Design 2020). One explanation might be that educators can be highly critical of their own approaches, but when they reflect on them and share them with others, they may discover that the underlying rationale may be valid and only modest adjustments are needed. Thus, even if few or no modifications are made to the design, the outcome of the workshop may still be valuable and rewarding for participants.

ABC as an Open Educational Resource (OER)

The UCL team had experience of various open education projects and consciously aimed to align ABC with the attributes of open education, namely: participatory technologies, working openly with people, innovation and creativity, sharing ideas and resources, connected community, learner-generated, reflective practice and peer review (Hegarty 2015).

Initial trials at UCL had shown the effectiveness of the ABC concept and the UCL team was keen to share and learn from the wider learning design community. At an early stage, ABC was released as an Open Educational Resource (OER) downloadable toolkit under a Creative Commons licence. As the UCL team presented and ran ABC workshops at a series of UK and European events and conferences, from 2016 to 2019, interest grew quickly across the sector. Others began to adopt the method and the UCL team realised how much their ethos of encouraging use and localisation (that is, institution-specific modification) was both helping its uptake, but also offering an external viewpoint on ABC's original conception, scope and principles.

Localising the ABC approach

A key aspect of the open education ethos was that new adopters were enabled and encouraged to adapt ABC to the local support structures and institutional needs, a process we called 'localisation'. The toolkit resources were in common MS Office formats and so readily editable. A two-year EU Erasmus+ project 'ABC to VLE' (Erasmus+ 2018), led by UCL, documented how various institutions modified ABC to align with local contexts. It was discovered that the workshop had often been extended, beyond the original 90 minutes, to 120 or more, with some adopters placing more emphasis on theoretical background, digital methods or learning outcomes. The six learning types were usually retained, but card sets were often adapted to meet local contexts, institutionally available toolsets and development priorities. Two universities changed the layout of the storyboard to distinguish face-to-face/on-campus and distance/off-campus activities. Curiously, storyboarding was not always the main objective. One institution, for example, just used the ABC cards without the storyboarding panel specifically to encourage faculty to design opportunities for active learning without necessarily scheduling them. Participants in some institutions were often asked

to engage in pre-workshop activities, or even preparatory workshops. A post workshop follow-up process was often offered to ensure that the creative ideas of the workshop translated into practice. The composition of the development teams also varied. As expected, most were teachers on the modules, but often support staff were invited to participate and sometimes students too. The UCL team, especially, has often worked with students on (re)design exercises.

One of the valuable by-products of ABC has been the development of a shared design language across the community, incorporating both the Laurillard learning types (such as Investigation, Production) and elements of the workshop itself (for example, ‘tweet’, ‘shape’, ‘storyboard’). Even when the structure of the workshop was amended, these core components provide a common reference point, useful in the sharing of practice. As an important aside, language translation, aiming to minimise linguistic and conceptual barriers, was often integral to the localisation process and at the time of writing there were 20 crowd-sourced translations of the resources, from Arabic to Welsh, and a wide range of downloadable community-sourced support material.

Moving ABC online: a collective initiative

Due to social distancing requirements in 2020, campus-based ABC workshops had to be suspended, but many institutions, including UCL, wanted to continue to use the ABC method with colleagues. As an inspiring example of cooperation in ABC’s open community, many colleagues shared their experiments in ‘virtualising’ ABC for the updated 2021 version of the downloadable toolkit. The most difficult component of ABC to replicate online was the element that in-person participants usually found to be the most valuable: the collaborative storyboarding. Several approaches and tools were tried by the ABC practitioner community, including shared documents (Microsoft Excel, Word or Google equivalents), collaborative digital whiteboards (Padlet, Miro, Mural and similar) and Kanban-style tools such as Trello.

The UCL team developed their own fully online version, employing the now discontinued Google whiteboard tool, Jamboard, as the storyboarding tool and an MS Excel sheet to support the learning types distribution graph exercise. Breakout rooms in MS Teams or Zoom meetings enabled academic groups to work collaboratively on their storyboard and later share their module designs in the main room with other module teams. In terms of timings and activities, the UCL online

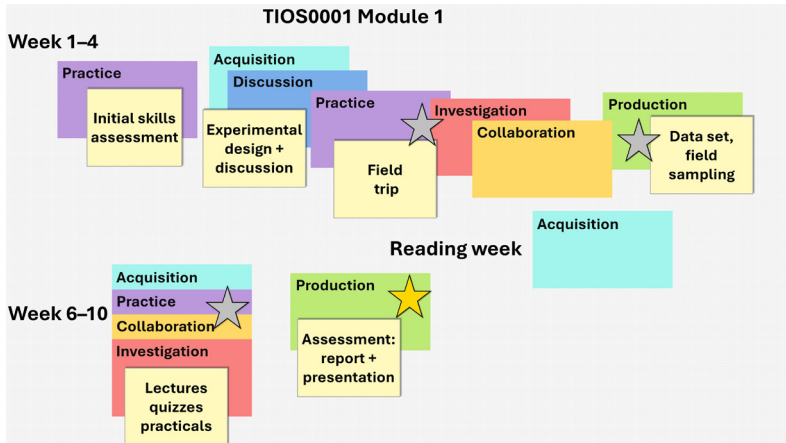


Figure 1.6 Illustration of an online ABC storyboard. *Source:* © Editors.

workshop followed the original in-person format and proved to be surprisingly effective. The cards and stickers can be reproduced easily online (Figure 1.6). The social aspect of the online event is somewhat restricted, of course, but much of the pedagogical richness remains, and the production of a shareable digital output is clearly an advantage.

Many community members described alternative online approaches (for example, Gormley et al. 2020; 2022) and the University of Sydney has released a useful online support tool (Liu 2021). UCL developed and uses the well-known Learning Designer tool (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/learning-designer> – see Chapter 6), also based on Laurillard’s learning types, which can supplement the ABC approach, especially for detailed design of learning activities, for example, on short courses and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

ABC at UCL: now part of a support process

In 2021 UCL established a programme development team aiming to build a cohesive end-to-end support process to help faculty from initial ideation through approval and on to module design, programme construction and, eventually, their reviews. The main components for this are collaborative pre-approval programme design workshops, post-approval ‘classic’ ABC workshops for module design, additional support workshops (for example, on assessment) and a set of downloadable support resources and tools. The UCL team promotes the idea

that learning design is not a one-time event, but rather an iterative long-term process of collaborative thinking and support. In addition, ABC is also often used as part of programme review. This process will be discussed in the following chapter when we describe the UCL experience of integrating ABC.

Building the ABC community

The flexibility to include diverse and localised adaptations has enabled cross-institutional transferability and alignment with local institutional initiatives around teaching practice and professional support processes. As mentioned above, balancing this flexibility, the ‘core’ ABC workshop has proved to be a powerful method to engage faculty in a process of educational change, and all institutional adopters of ABC seem to have retained and built their modifications around this fundamental element. As with the example above, of codeveloping online versions of ABC in 2020, the standardised shared design language enables the sharing of experience and approaches across the sector. More examples of ABC-related transnational activities are documented in Hasenknopf et al. (2019) and Knutsson et al. (2025). Users of the toolkit are always encouraged to join and build this wider community, not only to gain ideas and updates, but to contribute to it themselves.

The underpinning pedagogy of ABC is Laurillard’s Conversational Framework and the workshop, in both in-person and online formats, can be regarded as in itself a form of conversation. As Gormley et al. (2020) reflect:

the language of the [ABC] process is highly accessible and does not require knowledge of learning theory or potentially obscure concepts. This makes participation much less threatening and more inviting to those on the margins. Essentially, its egalitarian ethos ensures that anyone can contribute to the discussion and the ultimate design in a meaningful way.

With this participative, open education ethos in mind, it is hoped the international ABC community will continue to flourish and enable a global conversation about how we can work together to enhance learning design. To find out more, please see the key sources indicated in the Appendices in this book.

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2

Embedding ABC Learning Design into programme development at UCL

Clive Young, Karen Shackelford-Cesare,
Leo Havemann and Nataša Perović

Since 2015 ABC Learning Design (ABC) has been part of the programme development ecosystem at UCL. In this chapter we explore how the method has gradually become integrated into UCL's quality structure and broader strategic initiatives. Introducing educational change in large diverse institutions is complex and challenging, in both organisational and political terms. Without strong institutional backing and resources, informal change initiatives such as ABC must often take a pragmatic approach by aligning – perhaps sometimes opportunistically – with other internal initiatives or external drivers and leveraging existing processes. In this respect, ABC at UCL can be considered as a case study of a bottom-up change initiative that has achieved a reasonable impact.

Designing for quality

For context, UCL, located in central London, is one of the UK's largest universities, in terms of student numbers, with around 50,000 (including affiliates), and comprises some 100 departments, organised into 11 faculties, with roughly 9,000 individuals in various teaching roles. The institutional culture tends to be collegiate and decentralised, with much day-to-day operational control devolved to the academic units. Initiating any systematic change in such a distributed system presents particular obstacles.

As in most UK universities, UCL's quality processes are centrally administered. UK universities follow robust quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms to maintain and improve their academic standards. These processes involve formal internal procedures (within

each university), alignment with relevant subject and professional benchmarks and standards, and external oversight at programme level by external examiners drawn from other universities as well as at the whole-institution level by the UK Government's Office for Students (which runs the Teaching Excellence Framework (Office for Students 2020)).

Like other UK universities, UCL has had a well-established centralised process for approving new and amended academic programmes, modules and credit-bearing courses (often known as 'validation'). At UCL, gaining approval requires the completion of a set of programme and module proposal (or amendment) forms and supporting documentation that outlines the intent of the new (or significantly modified) provision, how it fits with UCL's broader educational offering, the business case, such as student number projections and delivery costs, and the broad educational format. Completed forms are submitted to formal review panels, at faculty and then institutional levels, and are subject to rigorous scrutiny.

The whole process had always been considered challenging and stressful for the academic leads who compile the submissions, but as noted in the previous chapter, curriculum design has traditionally lacked support in the sector (Nicol 2012, 4) leaving programme designers reliant on ad hoc and informal approaches outside of formal processes. Excellent programmes, modules and courses can be – and are – developed using this method, but the success of the educational design rests for the most part on the talent, experience and diligence of individual academic leads and their ability to persuade departmental and institutional colleagues of the value of their vision. Such approaches may be demanding and can be intimidating, especially for new faculty. In addition, their procedural nature, passing through a series of checkpoints in a linear fashion, may not always be conducive to eventual arrival at the best, or most innovative, programme design.

While such quality mechanisms are sometimes thought to push in the direction of norms and standards at the expense of creativity, it is also true that their centralised gatekeeping role can be leveraged to stimulate educational change. In response to UCL's 2014 Connected Curriculum initiative (Fung 2017), applicants proposing new programmes had to demonstrate how the programme would align with the principles of that framework. Although there was general academic enthusiasm for the change, in practice central support for programme (re)alignment was limited and many found the reframing around the Connected Curriculum criteria to be difficult. It was in this context that ABC was developed. The

initialism (standing for arena/active, blended, connected) serves as a reminder that in its early iterations at UCL, one key purpose and focus of ABC sessions was mapping the learning journey storyboards against the Connected Curriculum elements that were developed by the UCL Arena Centre for Research-based Education (the central academic development department). This approach made ‘reporting’ on the implementation of the Connected Curriculum elements across modules and programmes that had been through ABC comparatively easy, but using ABC for this (or indeed any other purpose) was for the most part voluntary. This shortage of strategic and practical support on the ground was a limiting factor in the effectiveness of UCL’s programme and modules approval process as a change mechanism.

Enhancing programme development

The need for a more systematic and supported approach was becoming clearer, brought into focus by external pressures. In UK higher education, the National Student Survey (NSS) is widely used to assess student satisfaction and inform drives for improvement in universities and colleges. Annual NSS surveys gather feedback from final-year undergraduate students, about their study experiences. At UCL, although the student satisfaction rate was reasonably high, in the late 2010s many similar institutions were ranked higher in the all-important National Student Survey (NSS) league table. The NSS questionnaire’s section on ‘assessment and feedback’ has tended to draw lacklustre responses across the sector and had been an acknowledged area of institutional weakness at UCL. Consequently, assessment and feedback were targeted for improvement, and Professor Simon Walker, who had been investigating this area at the University of Greenwich, also based in London, was appointed at UCL to spearhead a change initiative.

The performance of universities in the NSS was a factor that led Walker to think that academic development, hitherto typically focused on upskilling the individual teacher, also needed to support the whole programme. One finding in particular, from an analysis of published UK-wide NSS results from 2007 to 2016,¹ was that the single best predictor of ‘overall satisfaction’ was ‘the course [programme] was well designed and running smoothly’ (Burgess et al. 2018, 10). As this was coupled with complaints from students that their programme lacked coherence across modules, and that as students they seldom had a strong sense of belonging to their programme, Walker realised a change

of direction was required. Rather than support being viewed through the lens of the individual academic, a programme-level, leadership and team-orientated initiative was needed. Most importantly it was necessary to treat the programme as a holistic entity rather than a collection of discrete modules, related to some extent but often administered and taught with little regard for the programme aims. This in turn would require team-based dialogue to be facilitated among teaching teams and better support for programme leadership.

As both Greenwich and UCL had faced similar challenges with student satisfaction, several innovations initiated at Greenwich were introduced at UCL, where they were adapted and added to what would become UCL's programme development support portfolio. Perhaps the most influential of these was the CHART tool,² which had its origins in Greenwich's requirement to map 'graduate attributes' across a whole programme. Graduate attributes are the skills, qualities and competencies that students are expected to develop during their time in higher education, beyond subject-specific knowledge and capabilities. It was realised that a similar programme-wide mapping of other educational elements and, in particular, assessment practices, could also be very illuminating.

The CHART tool visually displays the types, weighting and time distribution of assessments across the modules making up a programme, highlighting the students' assessment load across their programme. It was also designed to pinpoint exactly where programme learning outcomes (PLOs) were being assessed. In implementation it draws heavily from the principles of TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment), a team-based dialogic framework aiming to enhance assessment and feedback practices (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet 2007; Walker et al. 2019). TESTA (n.d.) was itself developed to address issues of over-assessment, fragmented learning and ineffective feedback, ensuring that assessments contribute meaningfully to student learning.

In 2019 UCL experimented running joint TESTA and ABC workshops, an approach very well received by participants. However, the CHART analysis became more widely adopted at UCL for assessment mapping and came to underpin an 'assessment visualisation' workshop at UCL, where trained student partners inputted programme modules' assessment data, provided by tutors, and generated the charts. The implications of the assessment distribution (Figure 2.1) and evidence of PLO attainment across sets of modules could then be discussed with programme teams and/or module leads, sometimes including the students who generated the charts, as well as the project manager who oversaw the student partnership work, Sandra Lusk.

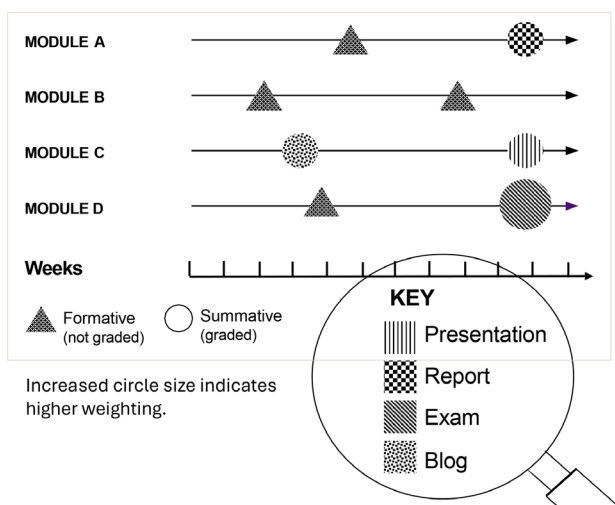


Figure 2.1 A graphical representation of a CHART tool generated visualisation of assessments across a programme. *Source:* © Editors.

Although, like ABC, the CHART tool was considered useful and appreciated by academic colleagues, as also with ABC it was constrained by not being part of a formal or mandated curriculum design or review process. Nevertheless, a strategic vision emerged to move curriculum design towards the TESTA ethos of comprehensive, effective, evidence-based review, an approach that had already been pioneered with some success informally by ABC’s developers and its growing circle of practitioners.

As UCL did not have a centrally mandated periodic programme review process, its approval process for ratifying new and significantly amended programmes and modules was identified as a strategic lever of change. Walker next developed a programme design workshop (in effect, a collection of activities which could potentially run to two substantial workshops) to support programme teams in the design of coherent, integrated programmes, and participation became a recommended component of the approval process. Care was taken in the programme design workshop to establish a dialogic, participative and consultative relationship between support and academic colleagues. The effectiveness of the workshop was in large part derived from an underpinning approach, to:

- Engage with academic teams early on, before formal documentation is completed and submitted for approval.

- Provide a diagnostic service via pre-meeting conversations to understand the thinking of the programme initiators and recommend support options/workshop activities.
- Facilitate forums in which important new (or existing) programme stakeholders convene to discuss critical aspects of their proposed programme from various stakeholder perspectives. Stakeholders here can be anyone with an interest in the programme, not only departmental faculty but representatives from other contributing departments, the student body, institutional initiatives, marketing team and occasionally external participants, such as potential employers.
- Focus discussions on largely non-discipline-related topics that can influence a programme's performance against salient metrics.
- Help teams to develop the documentation required for the approval process.

The programme design workshop and ABC were both built around the same discursive, team-based and advisory ethos and as UCL's programme development support portfolio evolved, the two workshops were increasingly seen to be complementary. In keeping with the definitions provided by Beetham, MacNeill and McGill (2024), whereas the programme design workshop supports curriculum design ('reviewing, planning and developing a course of study'), the focus of ABC is on learning design ('defining how learning will be supported within each course, module or unit'); however, as they also correctly note, 'the two design processes in any case overlap or iterate'. Each workshop addresses different stages and needs, in the process of developing a new programme, with the programme design workshop broadly most helpful at the pre-approval stage, focusing more on aims and outcomes, the coherence and structure of the proposed programme, with a specific focus on preparing for proposal submission. ABC then can typically be undertaken once the new programme is approved and more detailed module design work begins. But it is also the case that both the ABC and programme design workshops, or a selection of their components, can be used to good effect in the process of reviewing aspects of an existing programme.

The Programme Development Unit: an evolving offer

Turning to support for this change project, by late 2021, curriculum support at UCL had been formalised by the establishment of a Programme

Development Unit (PDU) as a specialist team within UCL's Arena Centre for Research-based Education. This involved transferring the 'ABC team' (the authors of this chapter, officially at the time known as the Digital Education Advisory team) from the Digital Education service into the Arena Centre, where they joined Walker and Lusk to build and provide the new programme development function. Its primary purpose was to ensure a consistent approach to the development of successful programmes and modules, by offering 'initiation to launch' or 'review and renew' support for new and existing programmes (Figure 2.2). This is how ABC became formally recognised and adopted as a mainstream university mechanism, as a key component in a portfolio of programme development support tools.

Each of the larger white boxes in Figure 2.2 represents a key stage in the programme approvals process at UCL. The small overlapping boxes refer to an activity offered to staff engaged in the development of a new programme or the revision of an old one. Each of these activities complements the stage it overlaps in Figure 2.2. The PDU's key activities or 'pedagogical interventions' are as follows:

- introduction to programme design and review
- pre-workshop planning meetings (to precede any of the workshops below)
- programme design workshop 1 (core activities)
- crafting effective (intended) learning outcomes at programme and module level
- programme design workshop 2 (further activities and deeper dives into aspects of a programme such as assessment, employability, connected curriculum, sustainability)
- student review (with student partners)
- ABC Learning Design workshop
- charting the assessment across a programme (supported by student partners)

The stage at which a programme lead, or team, may ask for support for their programme from the PDU varies. The make-up of programmes, in terms of the characteristics of their constituent modules, is very variable, which impacts on the nature of the support sought. For example, the ratio of new to pre-existing modules that will make up a programme has a significant bearing on how much of a programme is new and the extent to which it is, effectively, already designed and perhaps in use in another programme. The nature and focus of a programme, or the

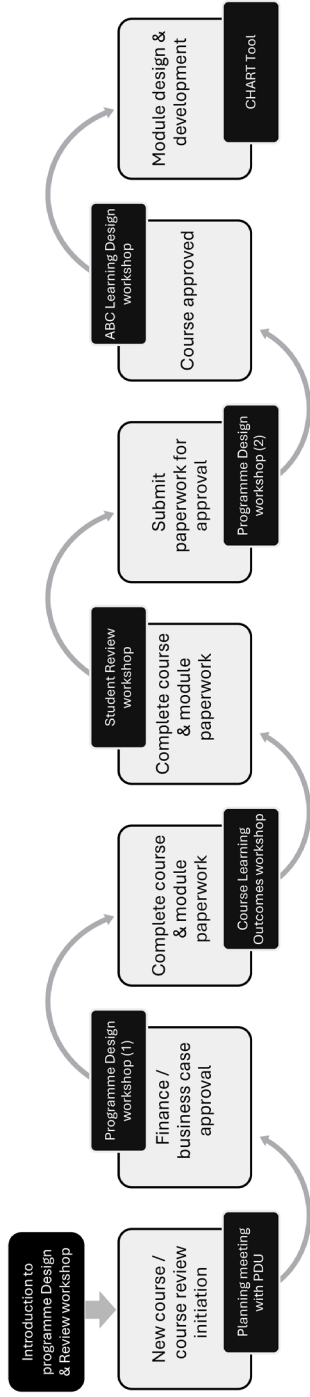


Figure 2.2 Programme development support process in UCL (example). *Source:* © Editors.

reasons for undertaking a review or redesign work, also require a flexible and customised approach, in order to take in the specific landscape of issues to be considered (see both [Figure 2.2](#) and the composition of the programme design workshop below). Practicalities, like the time available and the availability of academic colleagues, also affects the take up of support.

For teams about to develop a new programme or revise an existing one, the initial discussions with programme leads are key. The sequence of workshops or interventions depicted in [Figure 2.2](#) is only a suggested pathway, as, following discussions, a programme team may opt for any mix of interventions, and in any order deemed useful to them. The PDU often adapts a session to provide a bespoke workshop. As with ABC itself, awareness of, and adaptivity to, the practical needs of academic teams is essential to gain uptake and acceptance, but such flexibility incurs an overhead in pre-meeting and planning.

Although sessions can be usefully run independently, without reference to the others, each one can feed information and insights into any of the others. This is especially true regarding the ABC workshop, used to embed into the learning journeys of students the various strategies, initiatives, themes and practices that may have come to the fore in earlier workshops and related interventions. Many of these are identified in [Figure 2.3](#).

In [Figure 2.3](#), ILOs stands for ‘intended learning outcomes’ at either programme or module level (PLOs and MLOs, respectively). ILOs are intended to provide clear, specific statements that describe what students should be able to do on the successful completion of a prescribed unit of learning. UN SDGs are the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, a framework adopted at UCL and other institutions. A ‘signature’ learning technology is one that is applied strategically and directly facilitates the attainment of learning outcomes and objectives across a programme, for example, a digital tool, simulator or research model that is used throughout a programme.

It is, of course, infeasible for teams to address more than a few of these themes during one session, and programme leads usually prioritise one or two themes for the workshop. [Figure 2.3](#), however, usefully (and maybe alarmingly) illustrates the wide range of elements academic colleagues are often supposed to bear in mind when designing programmes. One of the advantages of ABC’s focused methodology is that teams must strictly prioritise the areas on which to concentrate. Other aspects can of course be revisited later, and often are, possibly by adding new markers to the storyboards that were created in the workshop.

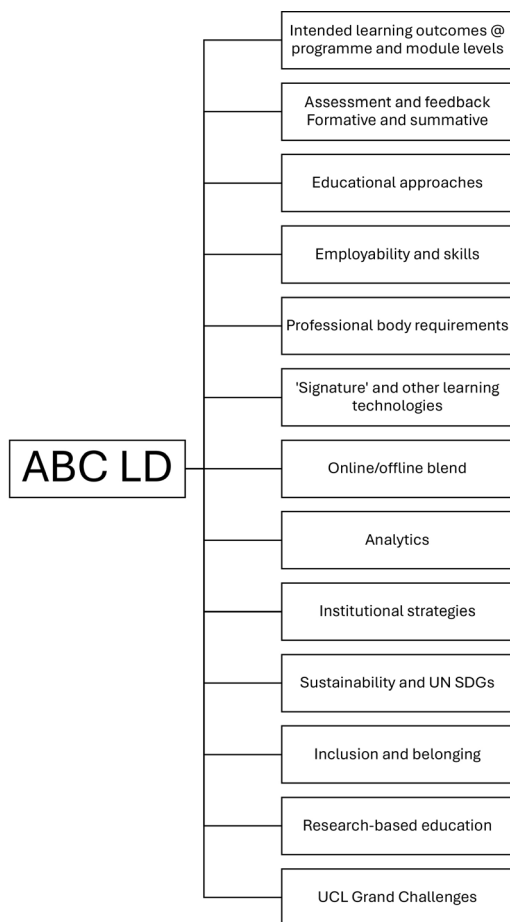


Figure 2.3 Using ABC to show how institutional themes and practices are embedded in programmes and modules. *Source:* © Editors.

As those familiar with the ABC workshop tool kits will know, self-adhesive silver and gold stars can be used to identify the occurrence of formative and summative assessments, respectively, on a storyboard. In the physical toolkits distributed at UCL, there are also blue dot stickers, originally intended to similarly signify the dimensions of the connected curriculum (Fung 2017). Stickers, markers and labels are used to visually identify the chosen themes where their implementation occurs on the storyboard. One consequence of the use of ABC, to bring together the modules and team members of a programme and to facilitate deeper thematic dives, is a need for more discussion before, during and especially at the end of the workshop (sometimes referred to as the ‘promenade’),

when each table team performs a ‘show and tell’ of their design. These extended ABC sessions therefore require longer than the 90 minutes of ‘classic’ ABC, and ideally should be allocated at least two hours. Some elasticity in scheduling events is advisable, enabling teams to continue a little beyond the finish time, if agreed.

ABC is also regularly used to embed key learning technologies that may underpin teaching strategies, as well as to map where ILOs may be achieved and evidenced. Most taught modules and programmes, at universities today, heavily use and often rely on a range of learning technologies, including a virtual learning environment/learning management system and all the tools it has to offer. These technologies may either support learning (for instance, as discussion forums), or aspects of course administration (assessment submission inboxes, for example) (Shackelford-Cesare 2014, 4) and ABC helps tutors embed those that directly facilitate learning into their students’ learning journeys.

As already suggested, ABC thus fits neatly into the suite of workshops in UCL’s programme development portfolio by providing a practical collaborative opportunity to map out the constructive alignment of a programme on a storyboard of student-focused activity. Constructive alignment tries to ensure coherence between intended learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment methods. In addition, it requires an active student-centred, constructivist approach to learning (see [Chapter 3](#) for more on this important concept). If the PDU is working with an existing programme, ABC may well be the first workshop they do and is used to plot the student journey through modules, and the programme, to initiate discussion on the effectiveness of the learning journey and possible improvements. Indeed, an ABC workshop can include a form that participants complete after they’ve placed their stickers representing formative and summative assessments on their storyboard with the information needed to generate assessment visualisations using the CHART tool.

The development of the programme design workshop that complements ABC is a significant innovation, worthy of some reflection. One of the criticisms of ABC, sometimes heard, especially by academic support colleagues new to the method, is that the design process doesn’t start with intended learning outcomes (ILOs), something of a tradition among professional learning designers. ABC is not a sequential instructional design methodology like ADDIE, and ABC’s originators contend that organic dialogue and brainstorming is more creative and less intimidating than rigid specification, especially in the early stages of design. The method was designed specifically for post-approval and review processes,

when outcomes have already been defined and a rough, or detailed idea of the assessment regime identified. The ABC workshop was designed for the specific context at UCL, where module leaders knew what they had to equip their students to achieve, namely the ILOs, but were unsure how to construct the learning journey that would take the students there. There was no structured and consistent support for designing this at the time. Hence, ABC filled this gap, in support for module leaders re/designing their module. Participants may bring their PLOs and MLOs to the workshop, to map them onto particular assessments.

Developing specific ILOs is an essential part of the approvals process at UCL and must be listed in the formal documentation, as they articulate a form of learning agreement between the student, the teacher and the institution. For this reason, at UCL the programme design workshop always includes an introduction to the crafting of ILOs. In practice the programme design workshop usually comprises two sessions, parts 1 and 2, that are now offered as separate two- to three-hour sessions. As previously mentioned, there is now an additional workshop available, on ‘crafting effective (intended) learning outcomes at programme and module level’, which explains the differences between learning aims, objectives and outcomes, and explores how to write good ILOs with examples. Sometimes this workshop is completed between programme design workshop 1 and 2, as suggested in [Figure 2.2](#). In such cases, participants may work on the ILOs before coming to programme design workshop 2, where they can be discussed in depth and feedback given.

It should be noted, from the point where a new programme gains approval there may be as much as two years before the launch, often involving a new group of academics who have had no or limited prior involvement. Facilitating an ABC workshop at this stage offers a valuable opportunity to review the outcome of the programme design workshop(s), if they have taken place, orientate the newcomers to the purposes of the programme and to start team building among the teaching group.

What, then, is the composition of a typical pre-ABC programme design workshop? The format depends on various factors such as the number of participants, whether it’s run online or in-person, how much ground requestors wish to cover and so on. Each of these workshops comprise a set of discursive activities that draw participants into deep discussions about some agreed subset of these topics and subtopics:

- **The vision they have of their programme:** how might they describe it succinctly to a prospective student? What are the top 10 qualities or characteristics they would attribute to it?

- **The programme's unique selling point/proposition (USP):** what is distinctive about this programme compared to others? Is there any danger of it competing for the same students as another UCL programme? What would make studying this programme at UCL so attractive?
- **The students they hope to recruit:** who is the programme designed for? What knowledge, experience, qualifications might they have or need? What will they have gained and be capable of, on graduation?
- **The programme level ILOs (or PLOs):** what evidence of student learning achievement do we expect to be demonstrated? It should be noted that module-level ILOs (MLOs) may be relatively easy to describe, as a module is a discrete, often quite focused, unit of study. Specifying the overarching programme-level ILOs (and how they may be evidenced) can be more challenging to articulate precisely. As mentioned, if this is problematic, then the two programme design workshops can be interspersed with the 'Crafting Effective (Intended) Learning Outcomes' session, offering more detailed guidance.
- **The programme structure:** what will it look like? What will be the core, optional and elective modules? What are their titles and MLOs? Is there enough coherence between the modules, especially if using modules from other programmes or departments?
- **The educational approaches the programme will adopt throughout:** which methods will characterise it? Examples are providing a research-intensive focus or research-based learning activities. Mapping to external professional frameworks may also be important, but also broader approaches such as problem-based learning, a strong focus on fieldwork or labs, interdisciplinarity and so on.
- **The assessment strategy:** how will students be assessed? What assessment instruments may be used? Are they consistent across the programme? Are there clashes or problems with too many assessments being clustered together? What PLOs will certain assessments be designed to evidence and to what level? A CHART mapping and analysis may be helpful, to deepen the discussion, whether during the workshop or as a follow-up activity.
- **Embedding employability:** UCL has developed a bespoke employability framework called the UCL Pillars of Employability, defining employability in broad terms and explaining the key learning that a UCL student should undertake, whether via their programme of study or through extracurricular opportunities, to prepare them

for their future careers and lifelong learning (UCL 2022a). A UCL ‘employability matrix’ may be used to help map each instance of a ‘pillar’ across a programme. It poses questions, relating to each of the six pillars, for the tutor to reflect on and address in their students’ learning journey. For example, regarding the ‘global citizenship’ pillar, one of the questions posed is: ‘do students engage with issues around equality, diversity, and inclusion?’

- **The digital skills students will have an opportunity to develop:** what digital platforms will students use to produce outputs related to their learning? Will students be asked to blog, for example, or create a website, or an e-portfolio, a video or podcast? And for what purpose?
- **Identifying areas or opportunities for sustainable education:** UCL has adopted a sustainability strategy which commits to ensuring that a ‘UCL education is a sustainable one across the curriculum, campus and community’ (UCL 2022b), including a toolkit for ‘embedding sustainability into your teaching and learning’.

As this can be a complex agenda, programme design workshops are typically preceded by an informal pre-workshop meeting to discuss with the programme lead or initiator, and one or two other colleagues who may be closely involved with (re)developing the programme, which topics or issues they believe it would be most productive to discuss with the wider programme team and stakeholders. Some programmes are more developed conceptually than others, so there may be great variation in the time allocated to each of these topics. Other workshops can also be organised to facilitate deeper dives into aspects of a programme, such as assessment, employability, connected curriculum, sustainability and so on. These may be facilitated by experts outside the PDU.

Another valuable Programme Development Unit intervention, listed in [Figure 2.2](#), is the ‘student review’. Programme leads or teams preparing their submissions for approval can submit drafts to a group of students, recruited and trained by the unit. The students are not necessarily familiar with the discipline in question, and their remit is to analyse and critique the proposals from a purely student-user perspective. These students may also participate in UCL’s formal approval panels. The intention with a student review workshop, similar to all of our workshops, is to contribute to the programme leader’s thinking about their programme design – in other words this is a way for students to work with and support staff in the process of quality enhancement (QE). Students also participate on UCL’s programme approval panel.

This is considered an important part of the university's quality assurance (QA) processes in order to provide a valuable student perspective at a key programme design stage. The student voice is much valued at UCL, and student input can often lead to an enhanced proposal.

More recently, in the context of a major strategic project calling for a review of all current programmes against a set of curriculum design principles, the PDU has developed a new workshop that sits outside of the 'initiation to launch' sequence, which a team developing a new programme typically follows. More of an information, discussion and reflection-based session, the 'Introduction to Programme Design and Review' is for those who want to know, in the first instance, what embarking on programme development or review entails. The session considers:

- what good programme design is and how this impacts the students' experience;
- how the interaction between programme-level learning outcomes and assessment can influence learning design to enhance student and staff experience;
- issues and approaches to reviewing a programme, from initial ideas to wider engagement;
- opportunities and challenges in existing programmes and timelines for review and enhancement;
- signposting the guidance and support available for programme leads and programme teams.

Conclusion

The way ABC has been adopted at UCL illustrates both the transformative potential and the real challenges of implementing educational change within a large, complex institution. ABC's evolution from an informal, grassroots project to a key component of UCL's programme development support portfolio reflects both the method's adaptability and effectiveness. By aligning with UCL's mandated approval mechanisms and establishing itself as part of a suite of integrated tools, such as the programme design workshop and the CHART assessment visualisation, over time ABC has become a key instrument for fostering coherent and student-centred learning experiences.

As we have seen, the institutionalisation of change in higher education is rarely straightforward. UCL's scale necessitated a pragmatic

and opportunistic approach, taking advantage of existing processes and priorities rather than imposing top-down mandates. The decentralised and discipline-specific nature of academic decision-making meant that ABC's success relied on faculty buy-in, flexibility and sustained advocacy. Even with eventual backing through the Programme Development Unit, challenges remain in ensuring consistent uptake, navigating resource limitation and balancing the need for structured support while respecting the autonomy of academic teams.

Ultimately, the case of ABC at UCL highlights the delicate balance between curriculum innovation and institutional constraints. The story of ABC in its host institution perhaps underscores a broader lesson about innovation initiatives: meaningful educational change in large universities requires not only effective tools and methodologies but also strategic positioning, collaboration and persistence. As we now turn to other successful ABC implementation scenarios, mostly from beyond UCL, it may be worth considering how much of UCL's narrative presented in this chapter is paralleled or reflected in their experiences.

Notes

- 1 Only the data relating to 'full-time students studying for their first undergraduate degree' (Burgess et al. 2018, 4) and from 'the largest 100 HE providers based on student sample size' (2018, 5) contributed to this finding.
- 2 The CHART tool is located at <https://studentengagement.org.uk>.

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3

Constructive alignment: institutional strategy for blended learning success

Loulou Detienne and Ele Holvoet

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, institutions are continually seeking innovative approaches to prepare students for the complexities of modern society. One such approach that has gained significant traction is ‘blended learning’, a pedagogical model that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning experiences. This chapter explores the implementation of blended learning in higher education, with a particular focus on the experiences and strategies employed at VIVES University of Applied Sciences.

Our educational policy to enhance blended learning

At VIVES University of Applied Sciences, the overarching ambition is to cultivate agile and resilient professionals capable of thriving in a complex, ever-changing world. To achieve this goal, the institution has embraced the concept of a ‘connected curriculum’ since 2017. This concept goes beyond traditional educational boundaries, to foster meaningful connections across various dimensions of the learning experience.

Origins and evolution of connected curricula

The concept of a connected curriculum can be traced back to Perkins (1993), who emphasised the importance of not only the way we teach (instructional method, classroom environment and assessment) but also the content itself, in creating effective learning experiences. However, VIVES expanded this definition to create a more comprehensive

and integrative approach (VIVES 2017; 2022). This initiative can be considered analogous to UCL's Connected Curriculum (UCL 2016; Fung 2017) where the focus was on the integration of research and education (learning through research and inquiry), but connections between disciplines and the broader society were also given a place.

Within VIVES, a connected curriculum encompasses:

- learning content
- instructional methods, classroom environment and assessment
- connections with the professional field
- engagement with broader society
- interdisciplinary collaborations within the institution

This holistic approach aims to enhance the connections between all crucial actors within the higher education landscape, including students, academic staff, research partners, professional field and society. The explicit intention is to strengthen and enrich the learning environment for the student with, for example, more activities in the professional field, in an international context or more room for interdisciplinary projects. In line with the ABC method we offer these connections on campus and off campus (Perović and Young 2015). This multifaceted learning environment aims to prepare students for the complexities of their future careers and societal roles.

Blended learning as a vehicle for connected curricula

To realise the vision of a connected curriculum, VIVES has adopted blended learning as a core pedagogical strategy. In our institution, blended learning is defined as the deliberate integration of on-campus and off-campus learning activities, supported by the purposeful use of educational technology (VIVES 2017). This approach allows for greater flexibility, accessibility and personalisation of the learning experience while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face interaction and community building.

The focus in the development of blended learning environments is initially on module level (Graham 2006; 2013). At this level, the emphasis is on identifying appropriate learning objectives, selecting a mix of on-campus and off-campus activities, integrating educational technology to support learning goals and ensuring alignment between objectives, activities and assessment.

Central to the VIVES approach to blended learning is the principle of 'constructive alignment', originally proposed by Biggs (1999; 2011).

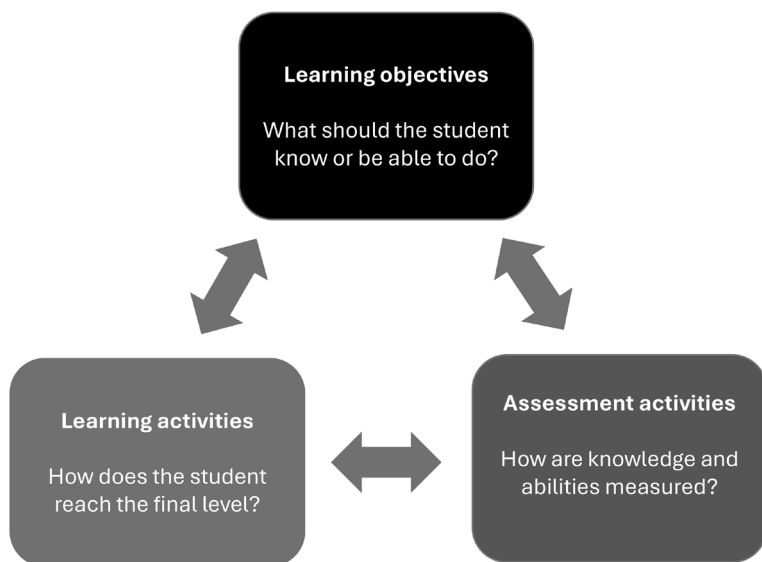


Figure 3.1 Constructive alignment principle (Biggs 1999; 2011).
 Source: © VIVES University of Applied Sciences.

This principle emphasises the importance of aligning learning objectives, learning activities and assessment activities to create a coherent and effective learning experience (Figure 3.1).

As an example, consider a course aimed at developing students' professional communication skills. In a blended format, the design brief might include elements as follows:

By the end of this module, students will be able to deliver an effective oral presentation on a complex topic to a professional audience (= learning objective). Communicating complex ideas with clarity and confidence is a crucial skill in any professional setting. This module is designed to equip students with the tools, techniques and experience necessary to craft and deliver compelling presentations tailored to expert audiences.

A blend of on-campus and off-campus learning activities supports the development of these competencies through hands-on practice, feedback and reflection. On-campus sessions focus on interactive, collaborative learning. Students begin with a workshop on presentation skills, where they explore key aspects of structure, audience engagement and verbal and non-verbal communication.

These foundational skills are reinforced through practice sessions with peer feedback, allowing students to present in a supportive environment, receive constructive critique and refine their approach in real time. The off-campus learning activities provide flexible, technology-enhanced opportunities to deepen their understanding. Students engage with video lectures that demonstrate effective presentation techniques, covering topics such as storytelling, slide design and handling audience questions. Additionally, students participate in virtual practice sessions that incorporate AI-powered feedback, enabling them to further rehearse presentations and receive instant, personalised suggestions for improvement.

Assessment is carefully aligned with the learning objective and learning activities to support both skill development and performance evaluation. Formative assessments¹ include online quizzes that test students' understanding of presentation principles, ensuring they have a solid theoretical foundation. Peer evaluations of practice presentations further enhance learning by encouraging reflective critique and collaborative improvement. Summative assessment² culminates in a final in-person presentation delivered to a panel of industry professionals. This authentic performance task simulates real-world expectations and provides students with valuable exposure to expert audiences.

In a blended learning context, constructive alignment requires careful consideration of how on-campus and off-campus activities can work together to support learning objectives. By ensuring alignment across these components in both on-campus and off-campus contexts, instructors can create a more cohesive and effective blended learning experience.

Integrated educational support: the adapted ABC method

To realise our ambitions of connected curricula, we needed to find a systemic design methodology. When (re)designing a course, many questions arise within the minds of our academic staff: How do we align learning activities between on- and off-campus? What technology or tools are available? How can they best be used and what can they be used for? Do I still achieve the goals of my course? So when we, in 2016, came in contact with the ABC Learning Design method from Perović and Young (2015), we found it a promising method because of the step-by-step

and tactile approach. As one of the first other higher education institutions to adopt ABC, VIVES developed an integrated support policy based on an adapted version of the ABC (Perović and Young 2015). This approach brings together expertise from educational development and educational technology domains to provide comprehensive support for faculty (Vandercruysse and Demeulenaere 2020).

Key features of VIVES's adapted ABC methodology

To promote effective collaboration across educational support initiatives, a common language has been adopted. By standardising terminology, communication between faculty and support staff becomes clearer and more consistent, ensuring shared understanding and streamlined efforts. Furthermore, an updated storyboard has been introduced, adding a valuable new dimension: the ability to classify activities as on-campus or off-campus. This enhancement helps educators better visualise and plan the integration and balance of various learning modalities within their course designs. In support of pedagogical innovation, there's an increased focus on activating teaching methods.³ Practical guidance is provided for implementing active learning strategies across different teaching contexts, whether working with large or small groups, and regardless of the presence or absence of educational technology. Additionally, assessment has been strengthened as a core component of course design. The original ABC methodology offered only limited guidance in this area, so a comprehensive, step-by-step guide was developed to support the implementation of both formative and summative assessment practices. This addition ensures a more robust emphasis on constructive alignment and meaningful evaluation of learning outcomes.

In the step-by-step plan, several questions guide the development of the assessment component:

1. What is the goal of the assessment practice? Is this summative or formative? To indicate summative and formative evaluation, stickers are placed on the storyboard.
2. What would you like to assess – product or process? What level of learning should the students reach – know, know how, show how or do?
3. Who will assess – teacher, peers, self or others?
4. How do you want to assess the student? What type of evaluation form would you like to design?
5. How will you provide the student(s) with feedback?

These questions are embedded in our wheel of assessment (Figure 3.2). This flow can be used as an extension of the existing ABC workshop, but can also be used as a separate session on assessment and testing within a course or education programme.

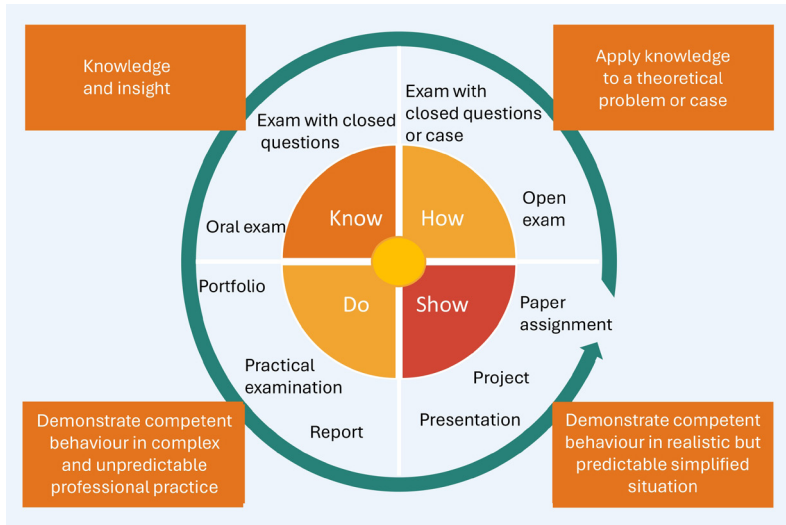


Figure 3.2 VIVES wheel of assessment. *Source:* © VIVES University of Applied Sciences.

Lastly, the range of educational tools, with associated support from the educational technology domain, is presented to teachers based on the same six learning activities in the ABC methodology. Teachers can immediately see which tools are eligible for their chosen learning activities and what level of support they can receive from within the institution (VIVES Wheel of educational tools, similar to UCL tool wheel: see Appendix 3). Three forms of support from the educational technology domain are possible:

- **High support:** manuals, training and licences are available for these tools. These tools are listed in the inner circle.
- **Limited support:** for these tools either a manual, a training course, or a licence is available. The tool is supported by offering one (or two) of the three forms of support. These tools are listed in the centre circle.
- **Inspirational:** these tools are provided as an option, for inspiration. No manuals, further training or licences are provided. These tools are listed in the outer circle.

As well as adjustments and additions to the material, the approach of the workshop was also adapted. This resulted in an intensive professional development programme for faculty, the Start2Blend trajectory. This track exemplifies the ‘teach as you preach’ principle (Kroll and Laboskey 1996), allowing faculty to experience blended learning, as learners, while developing their own blended courses. This blended learning experience consists of three sessions, each focusing on a different aspect of blended course design:

1. Learning activities and teaching methods: exploring various pedagogical approaches suitable for blended environments.
2. Educational technology integration: hands-on experience with selected tools and platforms to support blended learning.
3. Assessment strategies: developing aligned assessment practices for blended courses.

Because different educational support domains use the same pedagogical language and the professionalisation is coordinated, many teachers have already come into contact with (part of) the ABC methodology. The integrated approach therefore appears to be successful. The ABC workshops, Start2Blend track and our support policy which integrates the ABC methodology are experienced by the teachers as meaningful.

Challenges at the programme level

While course-level implementation has shown promise, VIVES recognises the need for coordination at the programme level, to create a coherent and effective blended learning experience across an entire degree programme. This involves aligning blended learning strategies across different courses, ensuring a balanced workload for students across their various blended courses and coordinating the use of educational technologies to avoid overwhelming students with too many different tools.

However, there still are some challenges in implementing an effective method for blended programmes. To ensure consistency and quality across all blended learning initiatives, educational development support staff identified the need for a coordinated approach, in terms of designing blended learning and alignment at the programme level. Technological progress strongly determines changes in society and the educational field. The COVID-19 pandemic gave a push to the evolving mindset of our future and current students, changing the student

population on our campus to students who had a flexible approach with the integration of technology in secondary education. In addition, the blended learning approach offered a possibility to lower the barriers for students who combine study with work and/or family and for this reason choose distance educational programmes.

Recent student surveys at VIVES also highlighted the growing demand for flexible, blended learning options. In 2021–2, a student survey took place regarding the technological equipment of VIVES classrooms for hybrid,⁴ multi-location and online education (Vandercruysse et al. 2022). The survey was a collaboration between the educational policy department, the student affairs department, IT and the student council. The questionnaire was completed by 1,254 students. Given the distribution across courses and campuses, the composition of this response group can be seen as representative for the population. The results showed that 66.8 per cent thought it was important or very important to have a choice in how they take lessons. More than 80 per cent of the students who completed the survey wanted a blend between on- and off-campus education. Up to one third of respondents were in favour of a 50/50 split. Only one in five of the participating students wanted to stick with a fully on-campus educational setting. These findings underscore the need for VIVES to continue developing and refining its blended learning offerings to meet student expectations and remain competitive in the higher education landscape. Moreover, it is also a fact that the labour market is itself becoming more blended: we prepare students for a blended working environment in which efficient use of technology becomes self-evident.

Towards a framework for blended learning at the programme level

Realising a connected curriculum through blended learning presupposes a number of preconditions that must be met. Based on the experiences in our higher education institute, we identified the following enabling elements:

- **Teaching assignments:** moving away from a system based on contact hours, VIVES calculates teaching assignments based on course credits. This approach allows for greater flexibility in combining on-campus and off-campus activities without penalising faculty for reduced face-to-face time.

- **Adaptive scheduling:** a more flexible approach to scheduling and classroom allocation facilitates blended learning programmes, allowing for variable time slots for courses, depending on the blend of on-campus and off-campus activities. But also, efficient use of technology-equipped classrooms, with resources allocated based on pedagogical needs rather than tradition.
- **Ongoing educational support:** the education policy department continues to work specifically on didactic and educational technological support for qualitative blended learning and strives for intensive cooperation with other services, for this the common pedagogic language based on the ABC method should be further implemented (Perovic and Young 2015).
- **Balancing student and faculty workload:** to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of blended learning, student and teacher workload needs to be thoughtfully managed:
 - **Contact hours:** how many contact hours are associated with one European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)? In our institution, the blended concept is the cornerstone for each course which means eight contact hours are standard, scheduled per credit. The contact hours must be combined with off-campus learning activities. For some courses in which campus infrastructure is indispensable, an exception can be obtained which makes it possible to schedule twelve contact hours on campus. This concerns, for example, courses in a laboratory or practical setting. The intention is to arrive at a maximum of 25 to 30 hours of study load per credit, which entails the on-campus and off-campus learning activities, together with the workload for assignments, hours of study work and assessment activities.
 - **Faculty workload:** teaching assignments are calculated based on course credits rather than contact hours, with guidelines for time allocation across various teaching and non-teaching responsibilities.

In order to realise qualitative blended education, other cornerstones can be adopted, for instance:

- **Flexible programme design:** encouraging programme-level flexibility in the allocation of contact hours, allowing for variation in the balance of on-campus and off-campus activities based on course content and learning objectives. But also, redistribution of

contact hours across a programme, with some courses requiring more intensive face-to-face interaction than others.

- **Scaffolding self-regulated learning:** recognising the importance of developing students' self-regulatory skills (Vermunt and Verloop 1999), VIVES advocates a gradual increase in off-campus learning activities, as students progress through their programmes. In a three-year bachelor's programme, the structure of learning gradually shifts to support students' development toward independent professional practice. During the first year, the emphasis is placed on structured, on-campus learning, offering students a solid foundation while gradually introducing them to off-campus learning activities in a guided and supportive manner. As students progress into the second year, there is a deliberate increase in off-campus learning opportunities. This stage is accompanied by continued support aimed at fostering essential self-regulation skills, enabling students to take more responsibility for their own learning processes. By the third year, the focus moves significantly toward self-directed, off-campus learning. This final phase prepares students to operate more independently, mirroring the expectations of professional environments and equipping them for the transition to the workplace or to further study.
- **Structured flexibility in course planning:** to provide students with a balanced and manageable schedule, it is recommended to incorporate fixed blocks for asynchronous, off-campus learning activities into student timetables. Also, allow for flexible scheduling of off-campus activities while maintaining a consistent overall structure. Finally, it is essential to clearly communicate the expected workload for both on-campus and off-campus activities to help students manage their time effectively.

Conclusion

The implementation of blended learning in higher education represents both a significant opportunity and a complex challenge. VIVES University of Applied Sciences' experience demonstrates the potential of a connected curriculum approach, supported by thoughtful integration of on-campus and off-campus learning activities.

By adopting ABC as part of a comprehensive framework that addresses course design, programme coordination, faculty support and student needs, institutions can create blended learning environments

that not only meet the demands of today's learners but also prepare them for the realities of a rapidly evolving professional landscape. In any large higher education institution there is a fine balance between respecting departmental autonomy while at the same time promoting a strategic approach such as blended learning. Working towards such a shared design framework can be facilitative in this regard.

As higher education continues to evolve, the principles and practices of blended learning will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping the future of teaching and learning. By embracing this approach, institutions like VIVES are positioning themselves at the forefront of educational innovation, ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 Formative assessment: when you use testing to regularly check to what extent students are participating, with the aim of adjusting student learning. These 'test moments' provide feedback for the students but also for you as a teacher, which can help in order to adjust learning and teaching activities. We also call this assessment *for learning* (William 2011).
- 2 Summative assessment: testing is primarily done at the end of the learning cycle to make a decision about the extent to which students have ultimately achieved the intended learning objectives. This is used in order to assess if a student can pass/fail and to award points. We also call this assessment *of learning* (William 2011).
- 3 Active learning: active learning activities are teaching activities that can be used to promote student learning. The use of active learning means shifting the focus from a more passive form of knowledge transfer to students actively constructing knowledge through learning activities that cultivate deep, meaningful learning (Prince 2004).
- 4 Hybrid and multi-location learning is conceptualised as synchronous education, where some of the students follow the lesson at a different location than the teacher (such as a lesson on multiple campuses at the same time, a lesson within one campus in parallel groups, or a lesson where some of the students follow the lesson at home).

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4

Enhancing reflection and inclusivity in teaching practice at two Irish universities

Clare Gormley, Rob Lowney and Suzanne Stone

Introduction

The ABC Learning Design framework is already well established across the higher education sector as a valuable tool for curriculum and learning design (Beetham and MacNeill 2022). However, its potential as a lens for enabling other important conversations has perhaps not yet been fully realised. This chapter focuses on two instances of how ABC was applied to support both reflection on learning and to enhance inclusivity. The first example discusses how ABC was used to frame open group reflections, ‘reflective practice’, by both staff and students on the learning experience of year one of an undergraduate programme at Dublin City University (DCU). The second example explores the integration of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) prompts within the ABC learning types cards, as part of a strategy at the University of Limerick (UL) to embed the principles of UDL in academic practices, for a more inclusive student experience.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is said to involve the systematic re-evaluation of teaching experiences in order to improve upon future teaching (Ashwin et al. 2015). The concept of reflective practice is nothing new and there are several definitions of what it means in the literature. Some put an emphasis on the experiential aspect, describing it as an important activity where ‘people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it’ (Boud et al. 1985, 19). Others put a focus on when

such reflection occurs, notably theorists such as Schön (2017) referring to professionals' need to engage in rapid 'reflection-in-action' in the midst of a situation or activity and also 'reflection on-action', some time after it has occurred.

Reflective teaching is viewed as a key characteristic of professionalism in higher education (Ashwin et al. 2015), underpinning a commitment to quality and a process of continuous improvement over time. The benefits of reflective practice include its capacity to illuminate areas for improvement, acknowledge existing strengths and potentially support educators through changing and challenging times (Machost and Stains 2023). However, despite such possible advantages, sometimes educators and students struggle with the concept and application of reflective practice. Numerous models, such as those from Rolfe et al. (2001) and Gibbs (1988), have been developed to guide individuals through the process and provide a starting point for interrogating thinking. While such models may be helpful, particularly in providing step-by-step reflective prompts for novices, they tend to focus on individual self-reflection. Used alone, they are perhaps less ideal for a more critically reflective ethos that considers the 'ethical, social, and political consequences of one's practice' (Larrivee 2008, 343).

For this reason, Brookfield's 'four lenses of critical reflection' offers an arguably more rounded approach that can account for multiple perspectives (Brookfield 2017). This teaching-oriented model encourages reflection through students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, autobiographical experience and the lens of theory. 'Students' eyes' refers to the student interpretation and experience of teaching event(s). 'Colleagues' perceptions' relates to the experiences of peers who may be teaching in a similar context. The autobiographical lens relates to self-reflection on an activity or experience, drawing on previous experience as a teacher or learner. The lens of theory uses the scholarly literature to better understand and position individual teaching approaches in a broader context. In this chapter, we draw on Brookfield's ideas in combination with ABC Learning Design in two distinct contexts.

First, we describe an example of how ABC-grounded reflective prompts provided a framework to explore the learning experience of a new undergraduate programme. A series of questions/prompts related to aspects of the six learning types were used to evoke open reflections from students on the programme, academic colleagues teaching it and members of the academic development team. This inclusive approach thereby sought to capture the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, as Brookfield suggests. In a second example, we discuss how reflective

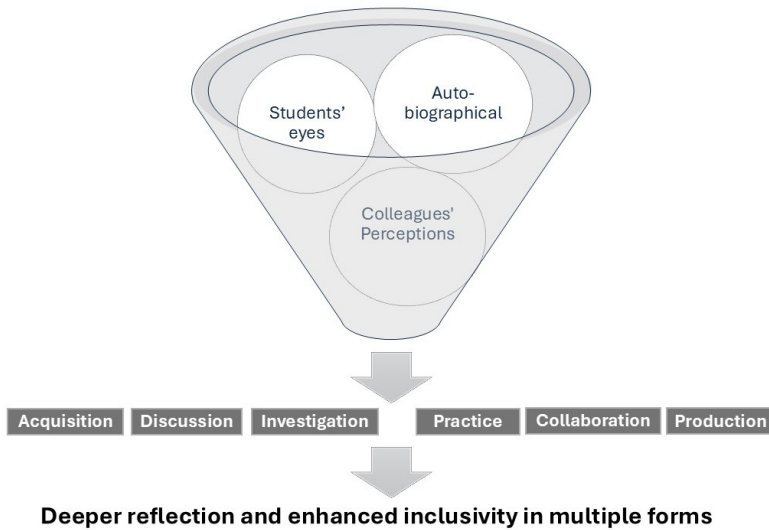


Figure 4.1 The four lenses of Brookfield and the six ABC learning types.
Source: © Clare Gormley.

prompts relating to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were developed to enhance reflection on curriculum design from an inclusive learning perspective, specifically. Again, focused prompts were created around the six learning types, this time to reflect on adherence to UDL principles and highlight potential accessibility gaps within a proposed design. In both cases, we suggest that the use of the six learning types provides the lens of theory – the fourth aspect of Brookfield’s model – to support a rich cycle of critical reflection (Figure 4.1). Each example will now be explored in more depth.

Example 1: Open group reflections on the learning experience

ABC Learning Design has been used at Dublin City University (DCU) since 2018 to support teaching teams to design or redesign modules and programmes. Having partnered with various institutions as part of the ABC to VLE Erasmus+ project (Gormley et al. 2020), DCU’s centre for teaching and learning, the Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU), has developed significant competency in facilitating ABC workshops and now promotes it as the recommended methodology for module design across the university.

Since 2018, the TEU has facilitated numerous ABC workshops both in its 'traditional' workshop format and in a bespoke online format which was heavily utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gormley et al. 2023). Regardless of format, the promise of ABC Learning Design to bring diverse programme/module teams together held up in the case of DCU, with teams noting the 'holistic view' it can provide (Egan et al. 2018) and the 'collaborative atmosphere' it can enable (Lowney and Andrews 2021).

From 2021, academic developers from the TEU collaborated closely with an interdisciplinary programme team to develop a new undergraduate programme. ABC helped to bring this team together and provide a common language to discuss how to design the modules on their new programme, which was important as the teachers from these disparate disciplines had not taught closely together previously. As well as being useful in designing the modules and ensuring a balance between learning types and activities, ABC elements such as the storyboard were used by the team as a management tool to plan workload and hours, across each module, each semester.

Facilitated group reflections

In Spring 2023, TEU academic developers were invited to facilitate a review and reflection of year one of this new programme, which had just concluded. Given the team's familiarity with ABC, and how intentionally woven it was throughout the programme's modules, it was decided to utilise ABC as a reflective tool for both the programme team and the first-year students. In 2020, the TEU had developed a resource of 'reflective prompts',¹ and shared it within the university as an aid for teachers conducting their own redesign of their modules for extended remote teaching during the pandemic. The TEU had not had an opportunity to use these prompts in a guided way, so this invitation offered the chance to 'road test' ABC as a reflective tool. The overall prompts were condensed into a smaller number to enable better time management during the reflection sessions, which are available via the accompanying Zenodo² community. One open group reflection session was held with the first-year students (~16) and another one with the programme team (~8).

Although students are experts in their own learning (NStEP 2021), the intricacies of learning design are likely beyond them. By its nature, ABC assumes no prior knowledge of pedagogical concepts (Gormley et al. 2023), thus making it an accessible framework, for students in particular. Three academic developers facilitated the open group

reflection session with students, opening the session with a broad question on why they chose this interdisciplinary programme, and then presenting reflective prompts for each of the six learning types. One academic developer chaired the discussion, posing the questions and ‘nudging’ students, inviting deeper commentary, while the others took notes, captured key points on whiteboards, and all three summarised the emerging points and themes. A slide presentation with the reflective prompts is available as an accompanying resource to this chapter.

During the facilitated open session, students reflected on how supportive the lecturers were during the first year of their programme, and their provision of formative feedback (practice), as well as how engaging the class discussions were (discussion), and how the mix of learning materials was useful for engagement (acquisition) as well as the support provided for critical evaluation tasks (investigation) (see Figure 4.2). They noted however that a slight reduction in group-based assessment would be welcomed (collaboration), as well as ensuring a greater alignment between assessment and module content, improving assessment scheduling (production) and some additional guidance in practical laboratory sessions (practice).

In conversation with a class representative afterwards, he shared that the student group welcomed this opportunity to reflect and provide feedback on their first-year experience in such an in-depth way, particularly as the programme itself was so novel. He stated: ‘We wanted to tell you how we felt; we wanted to voice our opinions on the course so that we could get the best out of the course’.

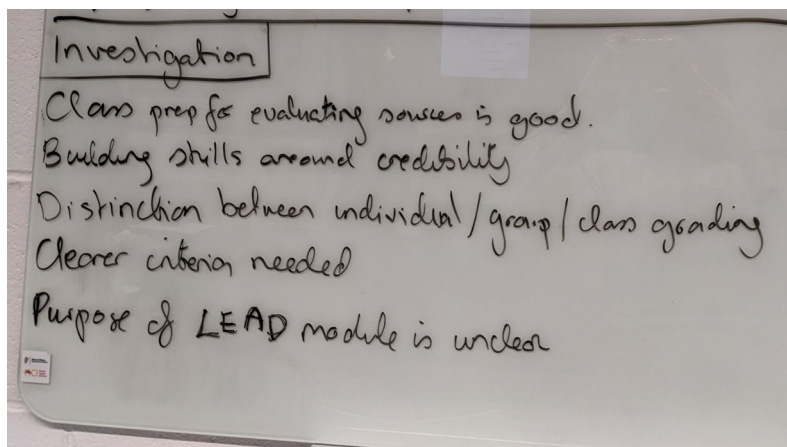


Figure 4.2 Photo of whiteboard containing student reflections on the ‘investigation’ learning type. Source: © Prajakta Parag Girme.

He also shared that the class group were appreciative of the session, confirming the idea that ABC was accessible, and that ‘the session was conversational; the slides and prompts were easy to understand’. Furthermore, he added that the group felt it was the best possible way to provide feedback, which they were eager to do. With the focus on learning types rather than particular individual experiences or points of contention, it allowed for a comprehensive reflection on year one of the programme as a whole.

A similar approach was taken to facilitating the open group reflection session with the programme team, who also shared similar reflections to the students. Following the session, the programme chair remarked that ‘assessment was a specific theme that needed to be explored’, in particular enhancing the alignment between assessment and module content. Specific reflections which surfaced in this regard included the provision of greater scaffolding for students in engaging with assessment (production), and strengthening the approach to group work and the recognition of individual group members’ contribution in the same (collaboration). The programme team also reflected on the need to better encourage and support student engagement in core learning material (acquisition).

Moreover, the programme chair shared that, similar to the students, the programme team welcomed the use of ABC as a reflective tool, noting that: ‘using ABC to review and reflect, it wasn’t about looking at each module and critiquing it, but looking at the whole programme’. She added that the team’s existing familiarity with ABC was a useful bonus, as expected.

Building on perspectives

The TEU provided the programme team with the outputs of these reflection sessions, after which they revisited their module designs for year one and began designing year two. They sought some professional learning opportunities from the TEU around learning outcome alignment and assessment design and grading rubrics, in order to address the reflective outputs. As the student cohort returned for their second year, the programme team met with them to explain how they had actioned their reflective feedback and what they could expect in the next stage of their programme. This served as a means of closing the feedback loop (Curran 2021) and highlighting the student-centred nature of the design approach.

All three parties involved – the students, the programme team and the TEU academic developers – felt the utility of ABC as a reflective tool

was warranted. In particular, the similar reflections emerging from the students and the programme team suggests a reliability of ABC in this regard, and the affordances of Brookfield's lenses as a 'rounded' model of reflection. While this particular case study worked well, it is acknowledged that the relatively small numbers of participants in the open group sessions enabled worthwhile and manageable discussion – higher numbers would certainly challenge this particular format. Additionally, although this particular student cohort were very comfortable in discussing their experiences, they noted this was in large part due to the session being facilitated by 'neutral outsiders' – the TEU. Students also suggested that some element of anonymous contribution during the session (for example, through a digital polling tool) could help any student who was perhaps less confident in contributing to the discussion. In keeping with Brookfield's thinking (2017) it is important to maintain awareness of student–academic power dynamics in this type of exercise. Furthermore, the deep familiarity with ABC and the facilitative skills of the academic developers were also key to ensure the discussion remained aligned with the learning types.

Example 2: Developing UDL prompts to reflect on inclusive learning environments and curricula

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to teaching, learning and assessment that aims to remove barriers to learning when designing learning activities and learning environments (AHEAD 2024). UDL draws on the concept of Universal Design (UD), which was first developed by architect and disability advocate, Ron Mace. UD is an approach to designing the built environment to maximise access for all users by designing options for engaging with the environment for everyone (Tobin and Behling 2018). A simple example of UD is the use of ramps as an alternative to steps, facilitating access for wheelchair users. In simple terms, UDL is the application of the principle of UD within a learning context. UDL aims to remove barriers to learning by designing options for learners to engage with learning environments and curricula, aiming to create inclusive learning experiences for all learners (CAST 2024).

A key tool used by educators, to enact the principles of UDL in practice, is the UDL framework. Developed by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the US, the framework focuses on removing barriers to learning within the learning environment for all learners. This is in contrast to differentiated learning, an approach that

adapts learning interactions in response to specific learner needs (Hall et al. 2003). The UDL framework, and the broader UDL philosophy, have been widely used across the globe to support the development of inclusive learning environments and curriculum design, over a number of decades. While recently there have been calls for more research to investigate the impact of UDL on the student experience (Jwad et al. 2022; Murphy 2020), there is an existing evidence base demonstrating the impact of UDL on creating more inclusive learning experiences across many educational contexts (Almeqdad et al. 2023; Capp et al. 2017; Cole et al. 2024; Jwad et al. 2022).

The UDL framework is structured around three key principles that address three different elements of the learning experience. 'Multiple means of engagement' focuses on designing options for welcoming interests and identities, supporting effort and persistence and developing emotional capacity. Multiple means of representation refers to designing options for perception, language, symbols and building knowledge. The goal of 'multiple means of action and expression' is to design options for interaction, expression, communication and learning strategy development.

In the Irish higher education context, the UDL approach has been widely adopted in all education sectors, with over 4,000 practitioners completing a nationally developed digital badge, since 2018. The commitment to using UDL as an approach to support and enact inclusive education is evidenced by the recent introduction of a national charter to support the embedding of universal design strategically in the Irish further and higher education sectors (Healy et al. 2024). At the local level, many universities have embedded UDL within their institutional strategies including the institutions where this example is situated, Dublin City University (DCU) and the University of Limerick (UL).

In 2019, academic developers at DCU integrated UDL prompts within the local version of the ABC learning types cards, to highlight UDL as a lens to examine curriculum design from an inclusive learning perspective. This integration reflected a broader commitment to inclusive learning, and complemented structured UDL professional learning, such as a digital badge and stand-alone workshops. The inclusion of UDL prompts within the ABC process was later adopted and further developed at UL, as part of an institution-wide UDL initiative, funded under the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE).³

Developing UDL prompts for the ABC model

The ABC model connects easily with the principles of UDL, as Laurillard's (2002) use of six learning activities resonates with the UDL approach of designing options for learners to engage with the curriculum and the learning environment. The initial work at DCU focused on spotlighting UDL to ABC participants, thus building awareness of UDL among faculty. Accordingly, the prompts were structured as short questions, included on each learning activity type card, prompting participants to consider inclusive design. For example, ABC workshop participants were prompted to ensure that all learners are accommodated for 'discussion' learning activities.

Discussion activity type suggestions:

- whole class discussions
- small group or paired discussions (book clubs, think-pair-share activities)
- tutorials
- seminars
- online discussion activities (forum, X, chat tools)
- web conferencing
- portfolio sharing/commenting
- audience polls/surveys (Google forms, Kahoot, Mentimeter)
- glossary sharing/commenting

UDL prompts:

- Are all types of learners accommodated?
- Must students speak in order to contribute?
- How will you check the level of understanding in the class?
- Can people who miss live class contribute to the discussion?
- Is orientation/induction time required for this technique?

At UL, the DCU prompts were reviewed and further developed to encourage a deeper level of engagement with the UDL approach, as part of the university-wide UDL initiative. This review process was conducted by the academic developer leading the UDL initiative and academic developers who lead on curriculum design and are experienced in using the ABC model. The process drew on the literature on UDL in higher education (Capp et al. 2017; Fovet 2021; Tobin and Behling 2018), and the practical local institution-wide use of the ABC model.

QR codes linking to live Microsoft Word versions of the UDL prompts were created for facilitators to use during ABC workshops, allowing for future refinement based on reflections of the ABC facilitators and formal research relating to the UDL initiative. The prompts for each activity type follow a loose pattern to facilitate efficient discussion as participants move through the ABC process. Participants are also directed to localised resources to support the development of inclusive practices post the ABC workshop. The full set of prompts is available via the accompanying Zenodo community, with an example of the prompts for the discussion learning activity type, as below.

UDL prompts for discussion learning activity type:

- Are you providing options for different types of learners/learner preferences? For example, can learners contribute to the discussion in both 'live' and asynchronous contexts?
- How can people who miss a 'live' class contribute to the discussion?
- Are student supports required for your planned approach/es? For example, do students need specific digital skills or research skills to complete the task?

Applying the UDL prompts in practice

The first ABC session using the revised UDL prompts was a 90-minute standard ABC workshop to support the design of a one-hour self-directed online course, introducing UDL to faculty. Significant work was already completed on the course, so the focus of the workshop was to refine the design of the course. As the course subject was UDL, ensuring that the design was inclusive was particularly important in this context, as the course designers were keen to model the principles of UDL to course participants. The session drew on the classic ABC model (Young and Perović 2016), starting with the creation of a tweet to describe the course, and building a storyboard for each unit of learning. Engaging with the UDL prompts was the final activity and resulted in discussion around some key inclusive design issues, illustrated by the following examples.

First, when considering the 'acquisition' learning activities on the course, the team were satisfied that adequate choice was provided for learners, through the use of video, text and audio content, in line with the principles of UDL. However, the discussion within the ABC workshop raised concerns in relation to potential confusion for participants, around the various content options. Potentially, participants could assume that they must engage with all content types. To mitigate

against this possible misunderstanding, the course designers committed to creating clear directions for participants to select content based on their preferred medium rather than covering all content provided. The second example relates to conversation around the ‘discussion’ activity type. While the course designers were keen to include the widest range of learning activity types possible, the inclusion of a discussion learning activity potentially presented a barrier for learners, given that the course is self-directed and participants are likely to engage with the course at different times. The course designers therefore decided to remove the discussion learning activity as there was no practical way to make this activity inclusive for all learners. Reflecting on the ABC workshop, one of the course designers stated that she ‘found the storyboarding process combined with the UDL prompts to be a particularly efficient way to integrate and map UDL principles to the learning activities’ (ABC design participant, June 2024).

The second opportunity to explore the value of the UDL prompts was an extended ABC workshop with 37 participants of a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning, Teaching and Assessment at UL. Participants were led through the classic ABC workshop by experienced facilitators, working in groups of four or five. Where possible, participants were grouped within disciplines/faculty to maximise the benefit for all. One participant within each group presented a ‘real-life’ module for consideration and the group worked together to redesign this existing learning experience. The group were invited to consider the UDL prompts throughout the entire process and towards the end of the session a 20-minute dedicated space was allowed for specifically addressing UDL prompts. In addition to the UDL prompts available to the group through QR codes and printed resources, the UDL lead was also available to offer clarification and advice on applying UDL in practice. This group had already been introduced to the concept of UDL through an earlier lecture on learning environments. Participants were invited to give feedback informally on the use of UDL prompts during the session and generally found that specifically focusing on UDL during the ABC session was useful, in terms of focusing on inclusive practice. The ABC facilitators also found the inclusion of UDL prompts positive, from the facilitator and participant perspective. ‘As we progressed through the workshop, having the UDL prompts easily accessible to participants was extremely valuable. As participants contemplated the design of the modules on which they were working, the prompts helped to ensure that UDL principles were a central part of important design decisions’ (ABC facilitator, October 2024).

Reflections on the initial rollout of the revised UDL prompts

The development of UDL prompts within the ABC model offered a useful means of prompting reflection on inclusive education through the UDL lens, as illustrated in the examples above. Two final reflections on these examples may offer guidance for others considering the use of UDL prompts within the ABC design process.

First, the knowledge and/or experience of applying UDL in practice, by both facilitators and participants, will influence how UDL prompts are introduced into the ABC model. In the first example, participants and the facilitator already had an advanced knowledge of UDL and therefore an introduction to UDL was not necessary. In the second example, the ABC facilitators had an advanced knowledge of UDL, as they had both completed a 25-hour digital badge. Participants also had some knowledge of UDL, through an introductory session on UDL earlier in the module. In this ABC workshop, participants readily availed themselves of the opportunity to check with the UDL lead, in relation to the UDL prompts, which suggests that having someone with an advanced level of expertise on UDL available to clarify the prompts can be of benefit for participants. It may not always be possible to have a specific person available at ABC sessions, but training for ABC facilitators on UDL could be a more practical option. Furthermore, if workshop participants are unfamiliar with UDL, a brief introduction is required before engaging with the prompts, to ensure meaningful discussion.

Second, for meaningful engagement with the UDL prompts, ample time must be allowed within the ABC process. In example one, the engagement with the UDL prompts generated a lot of discussion and meant that the session ran over time by approximately 15 minutes. In example two, participants had a longer timeframe than the usual ABC 90-minutes, as the facilitators were aiming for a deeper understanding of the learning design process as part of a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. In addition, participants were asked specifically to spend time reflecting on UDL prompts, for a 20-minute period at the end of the ABC session.

Further exploration of the application of UDL prompts in ABC design workshops is planned as part of a broad-based research study on the impact of UDL initiatives on academic practices and student learning experience at UL.

Conclusion

The ABC Learning Design framework is already well recognised as a powerful and accessible tool for the learning design process. As our two examples demonstrate, it also has potential as a reflective tool that not only widens the opportunity for multiple perspectives from different stakeholders, but can help to ensure that institutional strategic goals relating to inclusive practices are integrated into course design.

The first example highlighted how students could use ABC-oriented reflective prompts to reflect on their programme experience. In this example, we saw that students can use such prompts to identify assumptions about module and assessment design, in this case identifying some mismatches that needed to be rectified. As Brookfield (2017, 62) put it: 'Discovering how different students in the same classroom see us is one of the most consistently surprising elements in any teacher's career'.

The second example showed how ABC can be adapted with additional prompts to support focused reflection on inclusive practice through the lens of UDL. Through collegial discussions with peers – the sharing of colleagues' experiences that Brookfield (2017) recommends – the prompts highlighted important inclusivity-related design decisions.

In both cases, the recognisable format of the ABC learning types seemed to help open up, but also structure, a conversation on key aspects of learning design. These are not always easy conversations to have and any tools or frameworks that can help communicate and share perspectives are to be welcomed. While these are just two examples from our practice, we believe that the use of ABC-grounded reflective prompts – perhaps also in course validation or programmatic review activities – merits further research. Readers may also be interested in exploring the parallels between this chapter's reflective focus for ABC and the next chapter, which also leverages ABC as a catalyst for continuous reflection and improvement.

Downloadable resources accompanying this chapter are available at Zenodo.⁴

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Notes

- 1 Available online at <https://bit.ly/ABCReflectPrompts>.
- 2 Zenodo is an open repository for research-related digital artefacts.
- 3 SATLE – the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education – is a funding allocation administered by the National Forum in partnership with the Higher Education Authority to drive teaching and learning innovation and enhancement across the Irish higher education sector.
- 4 <https://zenodo.org/communities/abc-ld/>.

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5

One year later: tracing the impact of ABC on faculty development at Humanitas University

Manuela Milani

Introduction

As in many institutions, ABC has been implemented at Humanitas University (located in Milan, Italy) for designing and redesigning various university programmes. This chapter, however, underscores the value of the ABC workshop as more than just a programme design session. It can also be developed as a catalyst for ongoing academic development and as a space for continuous reflection and improvement in educational methodologies and practices. The ABC workshop at Humanitas University has been adapted as a transformative initiative to enhance faculty development through collaborative curriculum design and reflective practice. While immediate outcomes of the ABC workshop – such as participant satisfaction – are typically assessed soon after the event (see [Appendix 2](#)), a more meaningful evaluation requires a longer-term perspective. This chapter argues for the importance of robust, longitudinal measures, that go beyond surface-level feedback to examine the sustained impact of the workshop on teaching practices, curriculum design and academic staff engagement. This need aligns with Kirkpatrick's (2015) well-established model of evaluation, which considers outcomes at four levels: initial participant reactions (level 1), learning outcomes (level 2), changes in behaviour or practice (level 3) and broader organisational impact (level 4). While levels 1 and 2 are commonly addressed in many faculty development programmes, levels 3 and especially 4 generally remain underdeveloped. This is particularly true in course design-focused initiatives, where the

long-term impact on teaching culture and student learning is often assumed but rarely evidenced. In university contexts, where change is affected by a multitude of variables, such evaluation is both methodologically challenging and culturally sensitive. Nevertheless, it remains crucial to understand whether and how innovations like ABC can act as genuine catalysts for improvement and transformation in higher education.

Localisation of ABC to national and institutional contexts

Introduced at Humanitas University in 2020, during the difficult months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ABC workshop was developed from the experience of the Education Manager at Humanitas University who, while initially working in another Italian university, collaborated with the UCL team, from 2016, to adapt the workshop from the UK to the Italian context. As described in Milani et al. (2017), localising any tool, but particularly localising an academic design workshop, does not simply mean ‘translating’ the tool and adapting it to the language of the country, but, rather, considering all cultural factors from both the original context and the new cultural setting.

This broader understanding of culture is essential to avoid the oversimplification of equating ‘culture’ with ‘nation’. Instead, in the ABC localisation process, we adopt a more nuanced approach, recognising multiple intersecting cultural dimensions. In this regard, we find particularly valuable the interpretation of the concept of culture offered by Flowerdew and Miller (1995), who propose a cross-cultural interface composed of four distinct elements or ‘cultures’:

- **Ethnic culture:** ‘socio-psychological features which affect the behaviour of the students and which may contrast with the social-psychological make-up of Western lecturers’.
- **Local culture:** ‘aspects of local settings with which the members of a particular society are familiar’.
- **Academic culture:** ‘academic values, roles, assumptions, attitudes and patterns of behaviour common to the learners’ culture’.
- **Disciplinary culture:** ‘theories, concepts and norms and so on of a particular academic discipline’.

This interpretation is particularly useful because it exemplifies a critical and comprehensive way to engage with the concept of culture and to

view national cultural traits as deterministic predictors of behaviour. That is why, not only when adopting the workshop in a new country, but also when transitioning from one university to another, the localisation process requires additional levels of refinement. This includes addressing the relative ‘weights’ of various activities in the ABC workshop and their expected outcomes within the new cultural and institutional context. Such a deliberate adaptation not only ensured the workshop’s effective integration into the faculty development framework at Humanitas University but also exemplified the importance of aligning educational initiatives with the intersecting dimensions of institutional, disciplinary and academic cultures.

The localised ABC workshop at Humanitas University and the measurement of its impact

One of the defining characteristics of Humanitas University is its identity as a young and expanding institution with a focus on launching new degree programmes. This context calls for the development of effective tools, not only for shared curriculum design, but also for iterative refinement and ongoing redesign as programmes evolve. Furthermore, since many faculty members are primarily researchers or healthcare professionals, a key challenge lies in fostering a sense of shared ownership and belonging to the educational project of the degree course. In this light, the ABC workshop has been localised and adopted, not only as a tool for structuring teaching and learning design, but also as an opportunity to build collaborative practices and develop communities of educators.

At Humanitas University, the ABC workshop is typically held during the planning phase of a new degree programme or the design of a new academic year within an existing programme. The primary objective is to produce a macro-level design of teaching activities, following the classic structure of the ABC workshop while integrating contextual adaptations. One such adaptation emerged in the case of the newly established degree programme in medicine and biomedical engineering, among the first of its kind in Europe to systematically combine medical education with bioengineering. Given the novelty and complexity of this integrated curriculum, a specific activity was added to the workshop structure to identify and map multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary teaching elements across the academic year. These dimensions are not only central to the educational philosophy of the

programme, but also represent key indicators of its successful implementation. The inclusion of this mapping activity is therefore essential, particularly during the redesign phases, to ensure that the programme's original interdisciplinary intentions are not only preserved but effectively enacted in the delivery of teaching. This kind of adaptation reflects the broader aim of the localised ABC model: to create a design framework that is sensitive to the distinctive identity, challenges and ambitions of each academic context.

This attention to local needs and institutional culture has also shaped the structural evolution of the ABC workshop itself. In the Humanitas context, this has resulted in the development of a two-phase model, designed to support both the initial planning and the subsequent reflection on teaching practices. These two moments are referred to as the *ex ante* and *ex post* versions of the ABC workshop.

The *ex ante* workshop takes place several months before the delivery of a new academic year within a newly launched degree programme. Its purpose is to design, collaboratively and at a macro level, the teaching and learning activities for that year. The *ex post* workshop is, in contrast, held after the completion of the academic year in question and, crucially, after all instructors have also completed the exam period. This timing allows faculty members to engage in a more informed and critical reflection on what was planned, what was actually implemented, and what outcomes – particularly in relation to student assessment – emerged from the experience. Together, these two workshops create a structured framework for both designing and revisiting teaching practices, strengthening the connection between intention and implementation, and fostering reflective dialogue within the teaching team.

The *ex ante* version of the ABC workshop is structured around several key phases and serves as the starting point for this developmental process. It is held during the planning phase of a new academic year or programme, involves all faculty members who will teach in that year, takes place in person and lasts approximately three hours. As already mentioned, the primary objective is to produce a macro-level design of teaching activities, following the classic ABC structure while incorporating contextual adaptations, such as the aforementioned mapping of interdisciplinary elements in innovative programmes, like the degree in medicine and biomedical engineering.

In detail, the workshop unfolds through the following phases, each designed to support collaborative thinking, visualisation of the curriculum and constructive peer exchange:

1. **Preparation:** the participating faculty members are informed about the objectives and methodology that will be used in the workshop, with particular attention given to setting expectations regarding the anticipated outcome.
2. **Collaborative design:** instructors work in groups to brainstorm and map their teaching strategies, using visual aids to represent their ideas.
3. **Feedback and reflection:** participants present their designs and receive constructive feedback from their peers and (if necessary) from the facilitator, trying to promote a culture of continuous improvement.

Ideally, by the end of the session, instructors should have produced a tangible output that is both practical and relevant, fostering a positive perception of the activities' utility and effectiveness. Traditionally, the assessment of effectiveness has tended to rely heavily on metrics focused on participant satisfaction. While such data can offer valuable insights – particularly about the clarity of delivery or perceived relevance of the content – it often fails to capture the deeper, more meaningful impacts of the workshop on teaching practices and long-term outcomes. As the Kirkpatrick model suggests, satisfaction represents only the first level of evaluation. To understand whether faculty development activities lead to actual changes in teaching behaviour or influence student learning (levels 3 and 4), more comprehensive and longitudinal approaches are needed.

For example, although participants in the ABC workshops at Humanitas often express appreciation for the collaborative nature of the sessions – using phrases such as, 'It helped me see my course in relation to the others', or, 'We rarely have time to talk together about teaching' – these comments, while encouraging, remain at the level of immediate reaction. They do not provide sufficient information about how the workshop impacts the actual implementation of teaching strategies, nor how it might influence course coherence or student learning across the academic year.

This raises a critical question: When does a training proposal succeed, and when does it fall short? To unpack this, it is helpful to consider the types of evaluation that are most commonly used in faculty development.

Several categories of indicators are commonly used to assess the effectiveness of faculty development initiatives, as discussed by Salajegheh et al. (2020) and Fernandez and Audétat (2019). These include:

- faculty satisfaction, usually captured through structured feedback questionnaires
- self-assessment and peer observation, which can provide qualitative insights into perceived or observed improvements in teaching practices
- student outcomes, such as examination performance or retention rates, often used as indirect proxies of instructional effectiveness
- participation rates in development initiatives, sometimes interpreted as a sign of institutional engagement
- student evaluations of teaching, which, although widely used, are increasingly criticised

Student evaluations, in particular, may reflect a consumer-based logic more than a pedagogical one (Royo 2017), potentially encouraging instructors to prioritise satisfaction or entertainment value over meaningful learning. Recent analyses – including ‘Don’t let student evaluations derail your teaching’ (Gayeski 2022), and Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman’s review (2021) – emphasise how these tools, when used in isolation or without critical interpretation, may reinforce bias and compromise teaching quality. This highlights the need for more contextualised and reflective approaches to evaluating the long-term impact of faculty development activities.

While these approaches provide a helpful conceptual framework, at Humanitas University we have chosen to move toward a more structured, longitudinal model of faculty development that integrates evaluation into the lifecycle of newly launched degree programmes. In particular, the evaluation strategy adopted for programmes such as the six-year MD in medicine and biomedical engineering, the BSc in biomedical laboratory techniques and the degree course in medical imaging and radiotherapy techniques, is centred on the two-phase ABC workshop model.

From what has been described so far, the evaluation – particularly the impact assessment – of faculty development initiatives in general, and the ABC workshop in particular, is far from a straightforward matter. In methodologies such as ABC, which are explicitly designed to promote engagement and collaboration among faculty, there is a risk of conflating the method’s attractive participatory quality with evidence of its effectiveness. While engagement is a core feature of the ABC approach, and indeed one of its strengths, it cannot be considered sufficient to assess whether the workshop produces meaningful changes in teaching practices or course design.

To this end, we have implemented two complementary evaluation approaches that have already enabled us to generate more meaningful and actionable insights. These approaches have helped us better understand how the ABC methodology is perceived and applied by faculty, and how it might be further refined to strengthen its impact on course design and pedagogical collaboration. While still in the early stages of implementation, both strategies have contributed to a more grounded reflection on what constitutes effectiveness in our local context.

As an example, one faculty member observed: ‘The ABC workshop gave us a concrete structure to talk to each other as a team. It wasn’t just about planning but about understanding each other’s teaching logic’. Another noted: ‘Mapping the year after delivering the courses really helped me see where we lost coherence across modules’. Insights like these – not just expressions of satisfaction, but concrete reflections – have already begun to shape how we approach subsequent redesigns. These observations illustrate Stephen Brookfield’s (2017) argument that: ‘critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and scrutinise the assumptions that undergird how we work. The most effective way to become aware of these assumptions is to view our practice from different perspectives’. Embedding this kind of reflective process after course delivery allows for more informed and transformative evaluation – not simply measuring satisfaction, but actively engaging faculty in reconstructing curricular coherence and pedagogical alignment.

With this in mind, we developed two complementary evaluation approaches: ‘exploring relationships’ and ‘ABC *ex post* workshop analysis’.

Exploring relationships: A first approach involves investigating how the ABC workshop fits into the broader landscape of faculty development activities offered by the institution. Specifically, the aim is to explore how attending the invitation-only ABC workshop influences participants’ subsequent engagement with other voluntary, open-access faculty development events. This analysis helps us understand whether participation in the ABC workshop encourages further involvement in other initiatives, and how these different activities interconnect, in terms of content, goals and impact on teaching practices. By examining these relationships as they emerge over time, we can better assess the long-term effects and the cumulative impact of various development opportunities on faculty development. An analysis of this kind also allows for the identification of elements, mentioned during the workshop, that particularly capture the interest of faculty members for potential future exploration. Naturally, such an analysis is feasible when the mapped

training initiatives are voluntary and rely on the individual faculty member's decision to participate.

ABC *ex post* workshop analysis: This approach involves a follow-up meeting approximately one year later, providing an opportunity for participants to reflect, *ex post* (that is, based on outcomes) and, therefore, considering the differences between what they initially intended to achieve and what was actually accomplished. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to assess these differences; the goal is to reflect on the process and outcomes, and to gain insights into how the teaching practices evolved over time. This reflective process aims to allow participants to better understand their own growth and challenges, as well as the long-term impact of the training on their teaching practices.

ABC workshop *ex post*: insights from the one-year follow-up

Within this section we will focus on the second approach, namely the one-year follow-up meeting, which we define as the ABC workshop, *ex post* version. Here, participants reconvene to reflect on the outcomes, using guided questions to facilitate discussion and working on the concrete materials of the initial ABC workshop, such as storyboards. This follow-up discussion serves as a critical component of the workshop's framework. Where possible, the same faculty members who collaborated on the initial design reconvene at the same 'table' to analyse the storyboard they originally created, but it is important to note that the composition of groups often change over time due to different participants or shifts in faculty roles. This may complicate the process of conducting a thorough *ex post* analysis, especially when the original aims and design logic are not fully internalised by all participants. In such cases, the workshop becomes an opportunity for 'familiarisation', not only with the design process, but also with the original design intentions of the course, not just at an individual level but as a shared practice within the teaching team.

The workshop must begin by clearly outlining its objectives, explicitly aiming to prevent groups, revisiting the work from a year prior, from perceiving the *ex ante* outputs as prescriptive. This is not the intended meaning of the initial ABC workshop's outputs. Instead, it is crucial to approach them as starting points for reflection and analysis. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the outputs identified during the initial workshop may not represent the best possible

solutions. Differences between expectations and actual outcomes should be explored, as they can stem from various factors that were not fully considered during the initial meeting, such as students' actual preparedness or the timing of classes.

The follow-up meeting, organised in three phases, emphasises the development of reflective skills among educators, encouraging them to analyse the differences between the initial design and the actual outcomes. This reflection occurs through both individual and group discussions. It is helpful if each instructor first works individually, reflecting on their own experience, before sharing their insights with the group. The workshop structure is as follows.

Individual activity: phase 1

As a first prompt for reflection, each participant is invited to respond individually to the following questions regarding their participation in the teaching of the course:

- In general, what am I satisfied with?
- In general, what am I dissatisfied with?
- What went as I had expected?
- What did not go as I had expected?
- One thing I wanted to do but did not.
- One thing I now want to do.

Group activity: phase 2

Within the group, participants collaborate to identify the following:

- one modification to implement in the redesign for the next year
- one element from the initial design that was not adhered to but is still valued
- any aspect of the initial design that is now considered unfit for purpose, with an explanation

Reflection on students' perspective: phase 3

Groups are also asked to consider the students' perspective, reflecting on:

- What would students say about this teaching?
- What observations should be considered?

It is important to clarify that these questions aim to stimulate reflection beyond the feedback provided by students in the final course survey. While the data from student evaluations is not formally analysed during the workshop, faculty members are encouraged to bring their interpretation of this feedback into the conversation – particularly in connection with their own observations and the exam outcomes. In this sense, the process does not rely solely on subjective impressions, but integrates multiple sources of experience and data.

As an example, during one workshop, a teacher reflected: ‘I realised that the activity I thought was most engaging had the lowest student ratings – and now I see it might have been too ambitious for the time we had’.

The intent is not to replace systematic analysis of student feedback – which is already carried out at the institutional level – but rather to complement it with a more experiential and peer-based form of reflection. A comprehensive analysis of individual survey results for each course would be overly time-consuming in the context of these workshops. Instead, the aim is to promote critical self-reflection based on the integration of students’ perspectives, personal teaching experience and dialogue with colleagues, thereby fostering a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of teaching effectiveness.

Developing reflective competencies

In the Humanitas University variant, the structure of the ABC workshop – not as a one-off event, but as part of an ongoing process comprising recurring moments of collective reflection (*ex ante* and *ex post*) – is designed to build reflective competencies among instructors. This occurs not only at the individual level but also collectively, among faculty members teaching the same course and/or academic year.

In this sense, the workshop’s objective extends beyond improving student experience or learning outcomes. It also aims to strengthen pedagogical ownership, build a shared sense of purpose and cultivate professional engagement among academic colleagues. Engagement, therefore, is not merely a feature of the ABC method, but a meaningful outcome in itself – especially in contexts where teaching teams are newly formed or composed of professionals with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. This approach encourages a culture of ongoing reflection and observation, enabling educators to identify variables that can be adjusted to enhance teaching and learning quality. The development

of reflective skills is a key action in defining the faculty development offerings. Often, training initiatives aimed at developing reflective skills focus on individual-level engagement (as in the case of teaching observation). Even when they involve a group (such as in the practice of a reflective team), the emphasis is typically on solving issues that pertain to the individual. In this case, however, the aim is to provide an opportunity for developing the reflective skills of the group of educators participating in the workshop. In this sense, the priority is not necessarily a prescriptive redesign but rather the initiation of a habit of reflecting on both the planning and delivery of one's teaching. This reflective habit includes maintaining an active perspective of monitoring and observation, making it easier to identify variables that could be adjusted to improve the quality of both the teaching and learning experience.

As an example, during one *ex post* workshop, participants realised that two group activities from different modules had been scheduled in the same week, unintentionally creating a peak in workload for students. Although each activity had been pedagogically sound when planned in isolation, the overlap led to disengagement and reduced quality in the students' group dynamics. This insight prompted better coordination in the following academic year, with a more balanced distribution of collaborative tasks across the term. Such adjustments, emerging from reflective conversations, demonstrate the value of a shared monitoring perspective in supporting effective course delivery.

Human and organisational resources

Before concluding, it is useful to reflect on the human and organisational resources required for delivering the ABC workshop, both in its *ex ante* and *ex post* versions as described here. A key strength of this workshop model lies in its minimal demand for human resources. Even a single, well-trained and experienced facilitator can effectively guide both the *ex ante* and *ex post* phases. The *ex ante* version primarily requires preparatory efforts, such as defining the structure of the workshop, selecting participants and organising materials, like storyboards. In contrast, the *ex post* version involves additional coordination, to revisit and reflect on the outcomes of the initial workshop, potentially accommodating changes in group composition. In both cases, the success of the workshop depends on the facilitator's ability to foster collaboration, guide reflective discussions and translate insights into actionable outcomes. Strong governance

support remains essential to ensure alignment with institutional priorities and to provide the necessary logistical and administrative backing.

Conclusion and future directions

The two-phase ABC-based approach described here exemplifies a holistic model of faculty development, grounded in collaboration, reflection and continuous improvement. By integrating structured reflective practices and fostering a supportive teaching community, we believe this approach not only enhances educators' design capacities, but also contributes to improving the student learning experience. Future iterations will continue to evolve, ensuring that the ABC framework remains a dynamic and context-responsive tool for academic development at Humanitas University.

The forms of evidence introduced here are clearly supplementary to the 'classic' ABC format and invite a broader perspective on how the long-term impact of faculty development initiatives can be explored and understood. Rather than focusing solely on metrics in the strict, quantitative sense, this approach draws on reflective and dialogic tools – such as *ex post* workshops – that make it possible to identify patterns of change and misalignment, shifts in pedagogical priorities and opportunities for realignment. These tools aim not just to measure but to make visible the actual effects of teaching design interventions over time. As Biesta (2010) reminds us, meaningful educational evaluation must go beyond what can be easily quantified and, instead, embrace context-sensitive, professionally grounded forms of understanding. It is obviously (also in this case) a matter of identifying how these ideas can be implemented locally, both regarding the analysis of the relationship between the ABC workshop and other faculty development offerings, but also as the 're-presentation' of the workshop activity after subsequent semesters or academic years.

To make sense of this type of implementation, it is necessary to develop an overview of the faculty development offerings, where the relationship with ABC is meaningful and measurable. There are other metrics (or methods) that could be used to measure the impact of an initiative like the ABC workshop (in both its *ex ante* and *ex post* versions) and may be worth exploring. One is to measure the level of collaboration among teachers who participated in the workshop, assessing whether there have been exchanges of good practices or joint initiatives following the workshop. This option also falls within a broader analysis aimed at implementing capacity-building measures, expanding the focus

from individual impact to group impact, and from short-term impact to long-term impact.

In line with Salajegheh et al. (2020), another interesting perspective under discussion is to involve faculty participants themselves in the design of impact and effectiveness criteria. Rather than applying externally defined indicators, participants could be invited to identify what forms of impact are meaningful and achievable within their specific teaching contexts. This co-construction process may include defining context-sensitive indicators, articulating what types of change they consider valuable and reflecting on which forms of evaluation would actually be useful to them. Such an approach not only fosters capacity building but also strengthens individual and collective ownership of the development process. The direct involvement of faculty in identifying metrics and indicators could indeed represent a fundamental element for active engagement in promoting and measuring the effectiveness of the ABC workshop specifically, but also, of faculty development initiatives more generally.

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6

Adapting ABC for online learning design

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Introduction

At UCL, academics are invited to participate in an ABC workshop when developing new programmes or reviewing existing ones. During the 90-minute workshop, after a short introduction presenting the Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2002) and the six learning types, academics are able to use the learning types to model how they expect the learning experience will take place during a typical week of their module on the storyboard. This tried-and-tested process works well for blended courses (combining online and face-to-face teaching), especially with academics who have a good idea what learning outcomes their courses will have, and how to write assessments to test the students' attainment of these learning outcomes.

While online course experiences exist on much the same spectrum as blended courses, we found that the original 90-minute ABC workshop was too short when trying to guide teaching staff through the online context, where they are often less experienced. Even though academics are experienced in building blended courses, no matter what the blend of online and in-person teaching looks like, designing an online course is completely different. Online courses are delivered entirely online and can be credit-bearing, part of a degree, or standalone courses for continuing professional development. They can be small-scale and involve considerable tutor facilitation, or have very large cohorts being designed to be self-directed or peer supported. These courses may be new developments or adaptations of on-campus programmes, each requiring a different design mindset, which we will discuss in more detail below. This is chiefly because of differences in learners, where

their needs, motivations to study and existing skills and experience have significant impact on design choices. The obvious complexity of designing for online learning (Kebritchi et al. 2017) and the requests for further support that we received, as feedback to the original ABC workshops we delivered, highlighted that we needed to provide a much more structured approach, to help academics make decisions on how learning experiences are designed, so that they are attuned to the online context.

How do we adapt the ABC method for developing online courses? We start by defining key terms: the online courses, the online course development team, and the online learners. Next, we discuss the rationale behind adapting the ABC method specifically for online course development. Finally, we describe a three-workshop structure for developing online courses, which is based on the original ABC workshop method.

Definitions

Online courses

We define ‘online courses’ to be courses taught entirely online. The courses are taught primarily asynchronously (students engage with course materials individually, at different times, rather than together at the same time). Synchronous support might be provided, either by an academic or by peers. The amount of synchronous support could vary greatly between courses.

The course planning team

We will reference the team involved in online course development, distinguishing between ‘academics’ – those writing the course – and ‘facilitators’ – those running the ABC workshops to support academics in planning and development.

The course planning team includes academics and at least one facilitator. Often, additional members such as learning technologists, videographers, copy editors and online librarians are also involved.

The online academic

Online academics are responsible for writing learning materials. In some institutions, they might be referred to as subject matter experts, teachers or course authors. Often, the academics have little to no experience in planning fully online courses, and may struggle to empathise with their

learners (Becker and Schad 2022) in this new mode. Consequently, many will need expert support, to be able to design high-quality online content and learning activities.

The facilitators

Facilitators are responsible for guiding academics with the development of their course. They may also be referred to as learning designers, learning technologists or online learning advisors.

The online learner

Online learning attracts a diverse group of people who are seeking to be educated in a flexible and accessible way. Literature (Rahmani et al. 2024) suggests that online learners typically:

- have busy lives
- need flexibility, in terms of cost, location, access and pace
- are diverse, in terms of lived experience, prior knowledge, goals and expectations, and practical study conditions.

Online learners often need to fit their studies around other commitments. They need to be able to carefully plan their study time for the duration of the course. It is therefore important that online courses have a clearly explained structure, so that learners understand how to conduct their studies, even with minimal tutor assistance. Clarity and communication are key. To enable online learners to fully utilise opportunities presented by the online learning environment, learners need access to a carefully planned and well-articulated learner journey well before the course start date.

The impact of learners' needs on course design

To accommodate the needs of learners, an online course usually offers a complete learning narrative, with a beginning, a middle and an end, presented to learners up front. This means that the entire course experience, including all activities and resources, must be thoughtfully designed and structured in advance. Unlike traditional courses where elements might be developed while the course is taking place, this comprehensive approach ensures that learners have a clear roadmap from the start. It enables them to plan their studies effectively and progress through the course at their own pace with minimal tutor intervention,

fostering a more autonomous and organised learning experience. This means all constituent parts for an online course need to be planned, designed, developed and ready in advance of the first course launch.

The need for an online version of ABC

In [Chapter 1](#) we saw how the ‘classic’ 90-minute ABC workshop runs (see also [Appendix 1](#)) to help design blended courses, which usually have at least some on-campus, synchronous activities. Academics are usually confident in teaching blended courses that have face-to-face interactions with the learners, when they arrive at an ABC workshop for blended learning. They also know well what they want their learners to learn and have a good idea on how to do it using a mix of activities in face-to-face interactions. Usually, they only need a little encouragement to use technology correctly to their learners’ advantage.

Academics usually have to provide students with the broad learning designs for the entire curriculum, including learning outcomes and assessment, at the beginning of the module. Ideally, learning materials for the whole module are created and released before the module starts, but this is very unlikely for blended courses, especially if it is a new course. In practice when preparing content and activities for their modules, academics are only expected to provide materials to students up to two weeks in advance. This means that academics can continue to adapt their materials and planned activities after their modules have started.

How are online courses different?

Let’s contrast this familiar blended learning practice with the reality of an online course. As most online courses are self-paced, learners will want to go through learning materials as soon as they get access to the course. So, unless the course has a very heavy synchronous component, either with academic or peer support, learners will want to walk through the course so that they can plan their learning journey. This means that not only the learning design, but also all learning materials need to be ready before an online course goes live.

In parallel, while synchronous or on-campus sessions in blended courses can be used to guide the effective use of asynchronous online materials, for online courses it is recommended that guidance is in place within the course structure, as a minimum requirement. Even though

there might be synchronous meetings with the academic, it is essential that every activity has a clear description that explains how to use it and how long it will take. While students on face-to-face/blended courses might forgive an ad hoc approach to course design that is missing important information on how learning materials should be used – chiefly because the process will be explained by the academic in a face-to-face session – for online courses it is essential that clear instructions are provided at every step.

In the same vein, it is important to think ahead the way that interaction with learners will take place as part of the learning experience. For example, it is good to have a plan, regarding prompts that will appear on discussion forums, for instance, as well as the timing in the course. This is expected in order to enhance learners' engagement with activities, which is essential for online courses but not necessarily required when face-to-face interaction is involved.

As we see from the discussion above, it is important to remember that it is the expectations of the learners that are different for online courses when compared to blended and face-to-face courses.

Another important distinction is the number of tasks that can take a lot of time to prepare, such as creating video or audio activities. Usually these types of activities are used more frequently in fully online courses. Alongside the need for all materials to be ready before launch, it is important that these activities are identified and planned well ahead of time.

Beyond these differences to do with the fabric of online learning and the way it is shaped by learners' expectations and intrinsic tasks, the way our solution at UCL was built also evolved around the structure of our specialist online learning team. Our team comprises two learning designers, two learning technologists, one content developer and a course delivery manager.

How does ABC help?

The design principles of ABC workshops help academics see the learning path a learner will take. Laurillard's six learning types describe learners' interactions with the academic and their peers for every learning experience. With the support of one of our learning designers, academics start thinking how the learning outcomes of a module can be attained through a series of learning experiences. The beauty of the use of the learning types is that it works in a similar way to musical notation (Dalziel et al. 2016). Patterns of learning activities that are tried-and-tested

in other online courses can be easily communicated to academics. Academics can then compare them to the context of their modules and adopt and adapt the ones they believe are closer to the way they envisage learning to take place. Our recommendation is that similar patterns of learning experiences are followed for each section, so that learners anticipate how the rest of the course is structured.

With a small number of different learning patterns selected for each section, academics can now use the learning types notation to decide activities and learning materials needed for each interaction. At this stage, academics can storyboard how each learning interaction takes place, discussing and deciding on the learning experience sequences. This work is important as academics are getting ready to discuss their adapted designs with their learning designer, who will guide them and help them build a solid foundation of learning experiences. In parallel, academics will now have a very good idea of the learning experiences they want their learners to go through and can describe them to a learning technologist, who will guide them to use the correct tools to support the learning plan. In all these interactions, the six learning types form the basis of the discussion and serve as the common understanding of the experiences that are envisaged by the academics.

Adapting ABC workshops for the online context

Timing and planning the ABC workshop sessions

ABC workshops can be held in person, remotely, or both. Scheduling meetings with multiple academics can be challenging, especially during busy times of the year. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, academics often need extra help to understand the nuances of online course planning, requiring more time than the usual 90-minute sessions. The course development team provides extensive initial support, as planning online content demands more initial work than blended or in-person teaching. Front-loading support in this way ensures that by the end of the sessions, academics can work independently on their courses with minimal further support.

Allowing thinking time

Experience has shown that packing all the information into one long session, or back-to-back sessions, is not effective and, in fact, this strategy

causes cognitive overload (Sweller 2011). Academics have to absorb new information quickly. At the same time, they also need to create good learning outcomes, decide on assessments, plan media content and come up with activity ideas. Dividing the workshops into three shorter sessions over several days works better because it gives the academics space to think.

A three-workshop structure

In this section we describe a tried and tested structure for hosting ABC workshops for online courses. There are three facilitated workshops, plus one pre-work task.

Workshop one: learning design for the online context

Attendees: academic and facilitator. Suggested time: 90 minutes.

In workshop one, facilitators demonstrate how to design a high-quality online course, which incorporates key elements from the original ABC workshop structure. Below is a suggested outline for the workshop.

Set expectations

First, it is important to discuss the institution's approach to planning and developing online courses, highlighting and linking to relevant policies. This ensures a unified approach in the course development team. Schedules should also be reviewed at this stage, with an emphasis on key dates. Academics should be encouraged to inform the team of any scheduling conflicts.

Provide an overview of the ABC method

The facilitator gives an overview of the ABC Learning Design method, linking it to the Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2002).

Discuss an online course exemplar

The facilitator uses a specific module in a similar subject area to the one being planned, highlighting course navigation, structure, cohesion, narrative, writing style, accessibility and ideas for activities. This is crucial, as the academics may not have seen a well-planned online course before. At this point, links can be drawn to the different learning types of the Conversational Framework, emphasising activities that encourage collaboration,

practice and investigation. A learning design of the course is also presented, providing a valuable connection between the learning experience expressed using the six learning types with the actual activities used within the chosen virtual learning environment (VLE).

Plan an online activity

Academics choose a learning objective from the course they are planning and describe how they would usually teach it in person. The workshop attendees then discuss how this could be taught online. This activity usually provokes lively discussions and sparks ideas for other online activities to include in the rest of the module. Academics are prompted to think of more activities they would like to include for the following session.

Output of workshop one

- the creation of at least one online activity for the course.

Workshop two: choose appropriate tools and technologies

Attendees: academic, facilitator, learning technologist. Suggested time: one hour.

Workshop two builds on the previous workshop by exploring tools and technologies for different content and activities. A learning technologist, a videographer and/or an online librarian may also provide support and advice.

Digital tools

Participants explore different digital education tools and resources, discussing the learning types each one supports. Recommendations for academics are tailored to the specific subject of the course being developed. The facilitator should emphasise the importance of checking all course content for accessibility. Different media types are introduced, and the benefits and challenges are discussed. The following types are usually covered:

- ‘talking head’ videos
- panel discussions
- interviews
- animations
- screencasts
- podcasts.

The course development team advises on the available media resources and the institutional support for staff producing media content.

Course templates

The learning technologist demonstrates the institution's virtual learning environment's course templates and provides a written guide for future reference.

Pre-work task introduced

Before workshop three, the academics are asked to complete pre-work. The instructions for the pre-work are given at the end of this workshop.

Output of workshop two

- a list of activity ideas and associated digital tools for the course
- a list of potential media types to be included in the course.

Pre-work for workshop three

Approximately one hour. Completed by the academics. Instructions are provided at the end of workshop two.

Pre-work is a tried-and-tested method to enable academics to work independently, or with their co-academics, on their storyboards, away from the pressure of a facilitated session. It needs to be completed by the academic before workshop three.

The academics are given a digital storyboard to work on. Using a short instructional video as a prompt, the academics follow the ABC method to populate the digital storyboard. They may work together, or independently, depending on whether they are working on the course alone or co-writing it.

Learning Designer: our digital storyboard tool

The Learning Designer software application is another important tool used in the design of online courses at UCL. Learning Designer uses the same six learning types of the Conversational Framework as the ABC method and has proven to be a very effective complement to ABC workshops depending on the requirements of the course and the academic team. Learning Designer is an open, online learning design tool for teachers in all sectors of education and subject areas. Teachers can browse others' designs, create their own on a structured screen as a sequence of teaching-learning activities, each tagged with its pedagogic properties, obtain feedback on the nature of the learning experience designed, export the

design to Word and Moodle and share their design with others. Learning Designer designs represent a session or topic of a module. This means that it is expected that there will be one learning design for each topic of a module in Learning Designer. We provide our academics with links to learning designs of the online learning exemplar course, as designed using Learning Designer. The designs can include a lot of information that might not be known/desirable to be present during an ABC workshop. This is the reason why a learning design with enough information relevant to ABC is also included in the set of links sent to academics.

In Learning Designer, learning types are grouped in teaching-learning activities (TLA) blocks, in a design. In a module it is quite common that a set of TLAs will be the same for more than one session. In this case academics can focus on creating designs for each of the repeating learning patterns and then instead of starting from scratch for a new session, base the session on one of the design sequences that are already built. We recommend that academics create design patterns they expect will be repeated throughout the module and then use them as templates for each topic of their module. When working in a team, we suggest that they share each design with their team. Learning Designer makes it easy to define a team and share designs with the team, so that all team members can edit the designs. Collaboration is set up so that only one team member at a time can edit a design, while all team members can view the design simultaneously. The Learning Designer thus allows for scaffolding and collaboration out of the box. Designers are able to view designs of others and, if they so choose, to use them as templates for a new design. It is also possible to export and import learning designs, allowing designers to import TLAs from others.

During design sessions where multiple designers want to edit a design, we recommend that first one academic creates the basic TLAs of the design, that is, one TLA explaining what each editor will work on. Once this is done, the other academics can use the initial template to create new designs. In each design, the academic deletes the TLAs for other editors and designs all activities related to her part of the topic. Once all academics have edited their parts of the design, one academic can import individual designs inside the original template and move TLAs into place (see [Figure 6.1](#)).

Having designs created directly in Learning Designer, academics can have access to the designs from everywhere, in a digital format that also gives them feedback on the learning experience of their learners. The designs are saved in a format that is open and easy to download, back up and import to other applications. It is also possible to export learning designs directly to a Word document or as a Moodle backup,

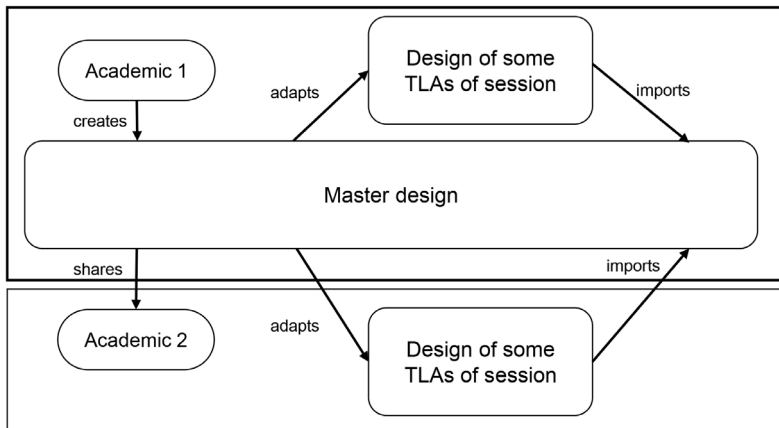


Figure 6.1 A diagram describing collaboration in the Learning Designer.
 Source: © Dionysios Dimakopoulos.

which can be imported to any learning management system (LMS) or virtual learning environment (VLE) such as Moodle, Moodle Workplace or Totara installation.

There is no expectation that the academics will have completed all designs for the whole course before workshop three, but the following should be present in the relevant topics in the storyboard:

- assessment types and location within the course
- topic/week/session names
- topic/week/session learning outcomes
- some examples of learning activities and resources.

Output of the pre-work:

- A partially completed storyboard for one or more sessions.

Workshop three: reviewing the storyboard

In attendance: academic, facilitator. Suggested time: 90 minutes.

During this workshop, the storyboard completed as pre-work is reviewed. The course outline template is introduced and discussed. Week/topic 1 of the course outline is completed.

Storyboard review

The academic and facilitator review the academic's storyboard together. The facilitator may suggest additional activities, and the academic may have questions about their course planning.

Course outline template

The facilitator introduces the course outline template for planning online courses, which is a simple Word document. Completed examples of course outline templates from other online courses are also shared (see an example of it in the Zenodo repository: <https://zenodo.org/records/15057063>).

Planning week/topic 1

Using the storyboard as a basis, content for week/topic 1 is added to the course outline template. The following are added into the template as outlines for week/topic 1:

- learning outcomes for the week/topic
- media items, learning activities, readings (titles, links, learning outcomes covered, placement in the week)
- assessment (if applicable) with the learning outcomes to be tested clearly indicated
- expected number of hours of learning each activity
- expected number of hours for the whole week/topic.

Output of workshop three:

- storyboard reviewed and a plan agreed on how to complete it
- a course outline template with one week completed
- link to course outline template is added to the design inside Learning Designer.

After the workshops

The academic should complete their ABC storyboard if they have not already done so. Once they are satisfied with their storyboard, they should move onto finishing their course outline template according to the provided schedule. The learning design specialist will review the completed template and provide feedback. The academic then follows the institution's online course development procedure.

Conclusion

Adaptations made to the ABC workshop for online course development have proven essential in addressing the unique challenges faced by academics and learners in the online environment. By incorporating a structured, multi-session approach, the workshops ensure that

academics are well-equipped to design high-quality, engaging online courses. The emphasis on understanding the needs of online learners, selecting appropriate tools and technologies, and thorough planning and preparation, has led to more effective and consistent course outcomes. These changes not only support academics in their course development but also enhance the overall learning experience for students, making online education a viable and enriching alternative to traditional in-person learning.

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7

Enhancing online learning at the University of Glasgow

John Kerr

Founded in 1451, the University of Glasgow is nowadays one of the world's leading research universities, offering a broad range of disciplines to more than 30,000 students from across the globe. Acknowledging the growing demand for flexible learning, the university embarked on a transformative journey, in 2014, to expand its fully online education programmes and short-form provisions. By 2025, this commitment has resulted in the development of over 75 Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), 30 credit-bearing microcredentials and over 25 fully online master's programmes, hosted on multiple platforms. This chapter examines the adaptations, made to the traditional paper-based ABC Learning Design framework at Glasgow, that were implemented in order to support many of these online developments. We explore the rationale behind these changes, the impact that Glasgow's alterations are having on course design processes and, finally, we focus on positive additions we have made to the framework to support the growing needs of our staff and educational offerings.

When Glasgow began its MOOC journey in 2014, it became apparent that a structured course design process was needed to assist staff in developing learning and teaching material for learners on large-scale online courses. At this time, Glasgow MOOCs were being developed rapidly across all areas of the curriculum by staff members with varying levels of experience in designing online courses. It soon became evident that designing MOOCs required a different approach than that used for typical online courses up to that point (Jansen et al. 2017; Kerr et al. 2015).

The change in approach required an evolution in thinking across two distinct areas. The first was in the pedagogical approach.

Conventional online courses that collectively progress learners through a degree programme often contain key specifics that help staff design structured learning activities, such as ice breakers, discussion forums and peer review stages. These course specifics often included maximum and minimal learner numbers, agreed course start and end dates, along with summative submission points that then allow scaffolded learning to be designed around them. With MOOCs, however, these aspects are difficult to implement, due to the flexible and diverse nature of learners, course progression with on-demand enrolment and personal learner engagement strategies for tens of thousands of learners (Kerr et al. 2015). Consideration must also be given to staff engagement levels during the course. After a MOOC is launched it might have no active educator presence, so the course material has to be designed with this in mind. The active presence is often replaced by video, peer-to-peer discussion boards and, more frequently, generative AI-powered feedback (John et al. 2024).

The second area that required attention was in operational design support. Glasgow's first two MOOCs were designed using local design methods and support. Given the institution's mixed economy in supporting online education, coupled with the growth of our MOOC portfolio across subject areas, Glasgow adopted the ABC Learning Design framework, to offer greater consistency for all staff involved in the MOOC design process (Young and Perović 2020). The move to a centrally supported model allowed Glasgow to curate a team dedicated to supporting the whole institution. As illustrated below (Figure 7.1), this involved several key stakeholders, all of whom contribute to the success of the material development and course delivery.

However, soon after adopting the ABC approach, significant limitations were encountered, particularly stemming from the constraints entailed in the paper-based format. Changes to the course structure or content required remapping of the original single paper sheet, a task that became cumbersome when multiple staff members were involved. A survey by Kolowich (2013) found that a typical MOOC takes over 100 hours to design. This process involves frequent design meetings and continual communication between course developers and key stakeholders. As small iterations are necessary to refine the design of a course, the paper-based approach proved inadequate for managing these changes efficiently and at scale. We recognised that adaptation was required to suit our needs.

To address these challenges, we explored solutions to the paper-based version while maintaining the overall simplicity and

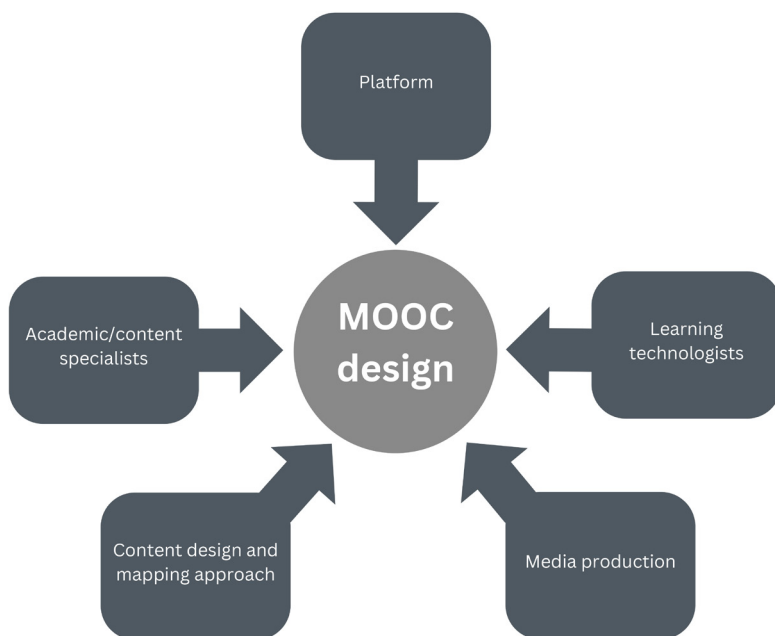


Figure 7.1 Key stakeholders in MOOC design. *Source:* © Author.

effectiveness of the ABC framework. One being, in particular, the manageability of the ABC learning types cards that staff could place and manipulate directly onto the map. Taking a holistic approach to improvements, we decided to digitise the map, utilising a digital whiteboard solution (Realtime Board, now Miro). The digital version retained the core elements of the paper map, allowing learning sequences to be built, week by week, in a structured fashion (Figure 7.2). The features of the digital board allow for a drag-and-drop setup of the learning types cards onto the map, with staff being able to add brief descriptions of the activity. Additionally, time allocations could be input for each activity, helping staff to manage the weekly workload. This shift to a digital ABC approach resulted in an agile, malleable and adjustable course design asset that empowered staff to create learner-centred designs (Kerr et al. 2019). The digital whiteboard became the single ‘source of truth’ on projects, accommodating real-time collaboration and ensuring that all stakeholders had access to the most up-to-date version. Due to the adaptable nature of the digital version, we have expanded and updated the example learning types on the cards as our learning technology stack grows with new products and services (Figure 7.3). An additional advantage we discovered was that through using the digital board as the

Course design map

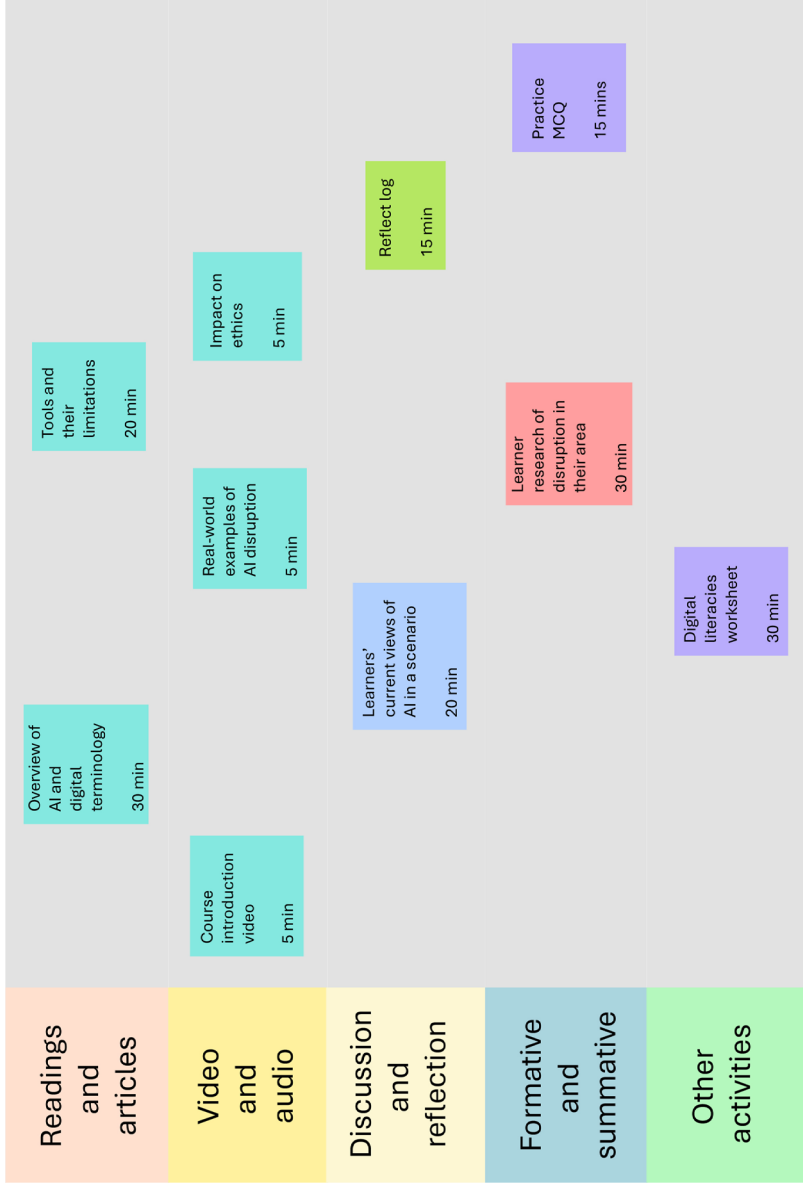


Figure 7.2 Miro course design map completed. *Source:* Course Design Map © 2025 by the University of Glasgow is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Learning Types adapted from the UCL ABC Learning Types Model.

Learning types cards



Figure 7.3 Learning types cards adapted for MOOCs at Glasgow University. *Source:* Course Design Map © 2025 by the University of Glasgow is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Learning Types adapted from the UCL ABC Learning Types Model.

main focus to the design process, staff were able to host online design meetings, offering greater flexibility in attendance.

While the digital map addressed many challenges that we were experiencing, it was only the first step in our local adaptation of the ABC framework. Teaching staff noted that while the map captured macro-level information, it was insufficient for detailing each step of the course design process (Kerr et al. 2019). They then reverted to using separate tools, like Microsoft Word, to add additional detail. This led to version control issues and a lack of consistency among design teams. It was clear from the research conducted by Kerr (2019) that there was a requirement to further develop the ABC approach and we identified the need for a more comprehensive system that would progress seamlessly from the mapping stage and allow for detailed planning and project management capabilities.

To address these gaps, Glasgow developed a sophisticated ‘time allocation spreadsheet’ (Figure 7.4a). The spreadsheet allows staff to capture the detail of the design map while producing visual graphs and charts to illustrate learning type deployment, time on task and spread of activities. Staff are expected to take the agreed structure of the design map and add the learning design sequence to the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet then allows more depth to be provided for each learning activity, such as notational learning time at individual task level, location of activity (in class or remote – an important aspect for blended courses) and the attachment of learning type for each activity. One main objective of the spreadsheet is in supporting staff in determining if the balance of activities in the course is as intended, through automated graphs that display a visual course breakdown (Figure 7.4b). If staff observe that the balance of activities is too weighted toward one particular learning type, or that not enough time is being spent on another, staff can return to the design map and adjust the activities, to provide more balance to the course, feeding this adjustment back into the spreadsheet.

The spreadsheet itself has gone through various developmental iterations. At first, the spreadsheet only contained each week of the course as a separate workbook, which meant that, although each week of content was captured, there was no easily observable course overview. To solve this issue and to provide a better user experience for staff working with this tool, we produced a ‘dashboard view’, which aggregates the weekly course data, with charts that represent a visual snapshot of the overall course design. Additionally, the dashboard page provides for programmatic design review, by allowing staff to share their course designs with other course leads, improving continuity between courses that contribute to the degree programme structure.

		Weekly Graduate Attribute Ethically and Socially Aware Independent and Critical Thinkers					
		Graduate Attribute 1	Graduate Attribute 2				
Week 1							
Staff Responsible	Title / Name	Learning Activity	Learning Type	Time (in mins)	Task Status	Activity Location	Learning Approach
John Appleseed	Lesson 1 - Course Intro	Reading	Acquisition	00:05	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 1 - Introduction to AI and Digital Tools	Reading	Acquisition	00:20	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 1 - Explore Your Own Knowledge of/Views on AI	Discussion Prompt	Discussion	00:10	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 1 - AI, GenAI, and Digital Literacies	Assignment	Practice	00:10	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 1 - Recap	Video	Acquisition	00:05	In Progress	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 2 - Different Types of AI and GenAI	Reading	Acquisition	00:20	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 2 - What Tools Do You Use and What Are Your Key Drivers?	Discussion Prompt	Discussion	00:10	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 2 - Types of AI and Uses of AI	Assignment	Practice	00:10	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 3 - Tool Limitations Based on Ethics	Video	Acquisition	00:05	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 3 - Over to You - Exploring GenAI Tools	Reading	Acquisition	00:30	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 3 - Using AI with Ethics in Mind	Assignment	Practice	00:10	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	Lesson 3 - Module 1 Recap	Video	Acquisition	00:05	Completed	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous
John Appleseed	End of Module 1 Assignment	Assignment	Assessment	00:30	In Progress	Remote (Home)	Asynchronous

Figure 7.4a Week 1 layout view of allocation spreadsheet. *Source:* Course Design Map © 2025 by the University of Glasgow is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Learning Types adapted from the UCL ABC Learning Types Model.

Statistics			
Learning Type	Allocation	Status	Tasks
Acquisition	01:30	Unassigned	0
Collaboration	00:00	In Progress	2
Discussion	00:20	Completed	11
Investigation	00:00	Total Tasks	
Practice	00:30		13
Production	00:00	Activity Location	Total
Assessment	00:30	On Campus	0
Total Time	02:50	Remote (Home)	13

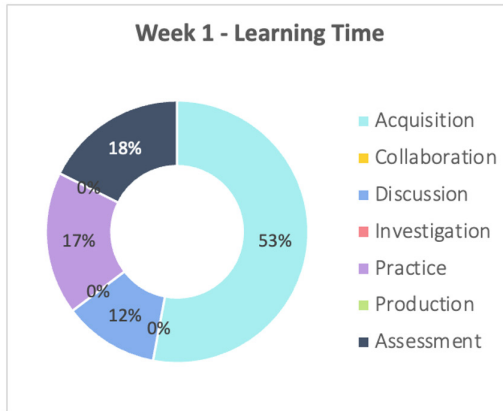


Figure 7.4b Week 1 learning time graph. *Source:* Course Design Map © 2025 by the University of Glasgow is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Learning Types adapted from the UCL ABC Learning Types Model.

As we focused on adjustments and refinements based on teaching colleagues’ feedback, we quickly identified that the spreadsheet could also respond dynamically, depending on what learning environment was supporting the course. While Glasgow utilises Moodle as its learning management system (LMS), courses are also developed on Coursera and FutureLearn – established MOOC platforms that are now hosting professional awards and degrees. Each platform has its own distinct learning activities. Glasgow University’s main digital learning platform, Moodle, for example, has over 40 learning activities, such as peer review, chat, forum, quiz and e-portfolio functionality, while FutureLearn has a more modest eight. To help provide staff with the relevant platform information, we added a platform picker to the spreadsheet. This functionality enables the spreadsheet to be more platform agnostic, increasing its versatility by dynamically adapting the list of available learning activities relevant to the selected platform. To date, we have constructed the spreadsheet to align with Moodle, Coursera, FutureLearn and XSiTe.

The spreadsheet is tagged under Creative Commons Licence BY-SA 4.0 to encourage use across institutions. The adoption of the Glasgow ABC approach has been widespread across our colleges and schools, particularly as the strategic demand for more online education offerings continues to grow. This initiative has permitted the central Learning Innovation Support Unit to offer the Glasgow ABC framework to all new online developments, regardless of course type or platform.

ABC has also proved a valuable component of the university's academic development provision. In 2022, we further integrated the Glasgow ABC approach into our Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCap), specifically within our online credit-bearing course, Designing Online Education. A significant part of this course explores learning design frameworks, with the second assessment requiring staff to use the Glasgow ABC framework to map out two weeks of an online course and justify their design choices. The goal is to equip staff with the skills and knowledge necessary for online course design. A recent graduate from this course reported on the impact that engaging with our framework has had on their professional practice:

I used Glasgow's Curriculum Mapping Tool version to enhance existing courses as part of the School of Education's national and international accreditation efforts ... This helped us identify gaps in my lessons and replace overly passive learning tasks with active, student-centred approaches, both asynchronous and synchronous.

As we continue to expand our use of the ABC approach, we have discovered new applications for the digital map and time allocation spreadsheet. A notable example is their role in supporting collaborative online international learning (COIL) activities. COIL fosters global, interdisciplinary experiences by enabling cooperative learning between students at different institutions (Hackett et al. 2023). At Glasgow, COIL activities significantly contribute to our key performance indicators (KPIs), particularly when conducted over a period of five or more teaching days. These activities aim to enhance student digital mobility by facilitating meaningful interactions between students and staff in two or more countries.

The Glasgow framework provides a robust solution for supporting COIL participation, offering a shared platform and structured process that enables staff from various institutions, who often rely on different learning technology solutions, to codevelop and co-create course activities. The School of Education, an early adopter of this framework

for COIL, has been influential in sharing the tool with higher education partners worldwide, over the past two years. This collaborative engagement has allowed global partners to integrate the framework into their own teaching and course design practices.

Looking ahead, Glasgow will continue to leverage and develop our version of the ABC framework to support its expanding online education initiatives. Plans are also underway to extend its use to blended courses, which will have a direct impact on the majority of our on-campus programmes.

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8

Digital asynchronous ABC for postgraduate teaching

Tim Neumann

Introduction: contextualising ABC Learning Design

Higher education institutions have long recognised the importance of designing courses that are both effective in achieving intended learning outcomes and engaging for students, particularly when these courses are offered partially or fully online. This is driven by an understanding that well-designed courses not only enhance student satisfaction and retention, but also improve achievement, thus underlining the need for robust and flexible learning design methodologies that can adapt to diverse learning contexts and technological advancements. A key feature of ABC Learning Design (ABC-LD) workshops is their aim to engage course stakeholders, typically the teaching team, but ideally also including learners, in structured pedagogical conversations to create visually mapped storyboards of the student learning journey.

The cooperative nature of the ABC approach extends particularly to learning design education itself. For students enrolled in postgraduate modules focused on learning design, blended learning, or teaching in general, experiencing the ABC workshop firsthand offers an invaluable opportunity to engage directly with a key methodology within their field of study. This chapter will illuminate how ABC can be effectively integrated into such a module, even when delivered online. It will explore the practicalities of adapting the immediacy of face-to-face ABC workshops into a pragmatic asynchronous digital format, one that encourages reflection while maintaining a degree of creative focus through time-bound activities. Finally, the chapter will address the pedagogical purpose of ABC in teaching, drawing upon reflections gathered from its implementation and iterative refinement as an integral

component of postgraduate education. The chapter will address three key dimensions: the positioning of ABC within curriculum development processes, the practicalities of its digital adaptation and the overarching purpose it serves in enhancing teaching and learning.

Positioning ABC in the curriculum development process

The ABC Learning Design workshop occupies a significant position within the broader landscape of curriculum and programme development in higher education, and it is frequently employed as a method for creating new academic programmes and reviewing existing ones. At UCL, ABC-LD has been formally integrated into the institutional frameworks that govern programme development and review (as discussed in [Chapter 2](#)) and works in tandem with other workshops and tools, addressing a specific stage in this process. In the learning design education context, it is vital to position ABC within the curriculum development process to optimise its value and link it up with subsequent steps.

ABC itself builds upon and complements other established learning design models, frameworks and tools. It draws inspiration from the Viewpoints project, a prior initiative that used a card-based curriculum design; its underpinning theory of Laurillard's Conversational Framework (2002; 2012) provides a robust academic foundation for its approach to learning and teaching, particularly in combination with constructive alignment (Biggs et al. 2022) to ensure coherent links between learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment tasks. Procedurally, ABC connects with other frameworks such as 7Cs (Conole 2013), Carpe Diem (Salmon and Wright 2014) and CoDesignS (Toro-Troconis et al. 2022), which help define ABC's positioning in detail, to instructional design models such as ADDIE (W. C. Allen 2006), the Dick and Carey model (Dick 1996), SAM (M. Allen 2012) or Agile methods, and to technology integration models such as TPACK (Koehler and Mishra 2009) or SAMR (Hamilton et al. 2016). Overall, however, it is crucial to identify which level of granularity ABC addresses in order to identify its optimal position in the course development process.

Granularity can be tricky to define, as Dalziel et al. state in the Larnaca Declaration (Dalziel et al. 2016), which proposes distinguishing between activities, sessions, modules and programmes. The wider literature appears to coalesce around three granularity levels

(Conole and Jones 2010): (1) micro level, typically a few hours' worth of activities; (2) meso level, typically structured blocks of activities over weeks or months; and (3) macro level, typically the whole curriculum of a course or programme that requires completion of multiple components. A single ABC workshop can address all three levels. The focus tends to be on planning the meso level in the storyboard task, although arranging learning types cards already encourages brainstorming of micro-level activity ideas, and running the workshop in a group allows for coordination discussions to address macro-level concerns. In the learning design education context discussed in this chapter, ABC is firmly rooted in the meso level, although students are encouraged to think about how information can be fed up and down to macro and micro levels. Indeed, students will transfer the ABC outputs to UCL's Learning Designer platform developed by the UCL Knowledge Lab, which shares the underlying theoretical framework and allows for detailed activity planning at the micro level.

To understand ABC's positioning in terms of course development stages, we could simply place it on the first D of the ADDIE model, which is the design stage, however, the concept of design itself is, like granularity, difficult to define exactly. The learning design frameworks mentioned earlier typically break down the overall learning design task into stages for developing (1) a vision, (2) a storyboard, (3) a sequence and (4) activity details, before moving on to (5) prototyping, (6) development, (7) implementation and (8) evaluation, even when the execution of the process is circular or agile. In this definition, ABC addresses most clearly stages 2 and 3, storyboarding and sequencing, while allowing for adjustments to the vision as well as setting initial outlines, perhaps even some details, for the development of activities.

The learning design education context benefits particularly from digital versions of ABC for two reasons: first, it preserves the output and makes it shareable with teachers and peers; and second, it allows for rapid adjustments in response to insights from other stages. For example, the detailed activity design might shift initial assumptions, or the development and implementation might uncover pragmatic boundaries that can be addressed by changes to the storyboard or activity sequence. A digital version can hence capture the evolution of a design, which students can use for metacognitive reflections of their growing understanding.

In a technical dimension, ABC can be effectively supplemented by a range of compatible tools to help bring a learning design to life. The UCL Learning Designer platform is a particularly powerful companion

that enables educators to move from the initial, rapid design of an ABC workshop to a more detailed and granular set of learning activities, with options to provide exports to virtual learning environments, thus covering stages 4 and 5, namely additional activity development and prototyping. To help run ABC itself in a digital environment, collaborative digital tools like Miro, Mural, Padlet, Trello or any other online whiteboard or Kanban board application, extend ABC's utility beyond the traditional face-to-face workshop setting. The preservation aspect of these tools allows for a strategic decomposition of the ABC workshop into its component parts, so that ABC steps can run over an extended, mostly asynchronous period, independent from each other, with the potential to incorporate reflective or formative pre and post tasks to enhance the educational value of the overall ABC workshop.

Therefore, the essence of ABC lies in its adaptability and its capacity to serve as an integral part of diverse educational strategies and design models, interfacing with various tools and aligning with multiple theoretical frameworks, with the Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2002) at the heart. While it focuses on the meso level storyboarding and sequencing stages of a course design, it interfaces conceptually and pragmatically with other stages and allows flexible adjustments to its output, particularly when used in a digital format, which then also offers preservation options, making ABC ideally suited for a learning design education context.

The practicality of digital asynchronous ABC workshops

The ABC workshop, initially conceived as a face-to-face activity, has already seen several adaptations to suit the demands and affordances of blended and online learning and working environments. This shift towards digital formats was amplified by lockdown periods during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the synchronous nature of ABC workshops was frequently highlighted as essential, for a variety of reasons.

In the context of the UCL postgraduate module Learning Design for Blended and Online Education, the ABC workshop has been pragmatically adapted into an asynchronous digital format. While the immediacy of face-to-face interaction is inevitably altered, the asynchronous approach offers distinct advantages, particularly for a diverse group of mainly international students. The asynchronous nature provides greater flexibility in terms of timing, allowing students to engage with the workshop activities at a pace and time that aligns with their individual

circumstances and time zones. To maintain a degree of creative focus, certain activities within the asynchronous workshop are designed with time-limited constraints, encouraging participants to generate ideas rapidly and efficiently, mirroring the sprint-like nature of the original 90-minute face-to-face workshop.

The practicality of this digital adaptation is further demonstrated by examining the specific activities embedded within the module:

- **The ‘tweet’ exercise:** This activity, traditionally used as an icebreaker in face-to-face workshops, is adapted to an asynchronous setting. Students are asked to concisely summarise their module design idea in the format of a brief tweet-style description, focusing on the core value proposition and target audience. This exercise encourages students to articulate their vision clearly and succinctly, while addressing a target audience identified in an earlier exercise at the analysis stage. As students also need to choose their own topic and context for a learning design project, running this exercise asynchronously gives them the time to consider their options, which is essential when embarking on a multi-week project.
- **The initial spider graph:** This activity runs alongside readings about the Conversational Framework. Students are asked to individually reflect on the learning types relevant to their module design and represent their initial thoughts on a spider graph spreadsheet template, which produces a graph that is then shared with the whole class in an image gallery. This provides a visual starting point for their design thinking and allows the tutor to highlight differences and identify patterns, as a discussion starter.
- **The initial storyboard:** This core ABC activity is adapted into a timed asynchronous exercise. Students are tasked with rapidly drafting a curriculum for a learning episode of a specified duration with a minimum of 12 learning hours, using a mural board adapted from an ABC template. This initial draft focuses on the sequence and types of learning activities.
- **Small group showcase and discussion:** Following the initial storyboard activity, students are divided into small groups of six and have a two-week period to asynchronously showcase their design drafts and engage in discussions via online forums and in synchronous classes. This allows for peer feedback and collaborative refinement.
- **Progressive detailing and transition to Learning Designer:** Students continue to develop their storyboard, adding more detail

over time, which would be difficult to achieve in a paper version of the ABC workshop. Subsequently, they transition to the Learning Designer platform to populate their designs with granular details, including specific activities, resources and assessment methods. This step mirrors the real-world process of moving from a high-level design to a detailed blueprint.

- **Return to the spider graph:** As part of the final assignment, students revisit their initial spider graph and justify their design decisions, referencing the detailed activity descriptions they have created in the Learning Designer. This encourages reflection, where students connect their initial conceptualisation with their final design.

Pedagogic value of digital asynchronous ABC in postgraduate education

Reflecting on the iterative improvements of the asynchronous digital ABC workshop, within the postgraduate Learning Design module, highlights several key purposes that this activity serves for teaching, beyond the practicalities of its digital adaptation. Its integration into postgraduate education, particularly in an asynchronous online format, provides distinct pedagogical advantages grounded in established learning theories and contemporary educational needs.

One significant benefit is the provision of an authentic or situated learning experience. Students engage directly with a methodology actively used by academics and learning designers in professional contexts, mirroring real-world curriculum development processes. Unlike typical ABC workshop participants, who are often subject matter experts designing courses in their fields, postgraduate students in a learning design module approach the exercise with a more theoretical lens. They deeply engage with the underlying principles of Laurillard's Conversational Framework as they design their own learning episodes. The asynchronous format allows necessary time for reflection, analysis and synthesis, which is crucial for this deeper engagement with design principles. Furthermore, the process requires students to transfer their ABC outputs to platforms like the UCL Learning Designer, populating their high-level storyboards with granular details. This transition from meso-level design to micro-level activity planning directly mirrors how learning design is often conducted in practice, thereby offering a truly situated experience where knowledge is applied in meaningful, realistic scenarios. This aligns with broader observations that online learning can

connect theoretical concepts with practical applications, making learning more meaningful. Feedback from graduates suggests this approach successfully equips students with employment-related skills, and we have seen successful career pathways.

A second significant benefit of the digital adaptation is the enhanced capacity for *preservation* of the outputs generated during the workshop. Digital artefacts, like the initial spider graphs and the evolving storyboards created in tools like Mural, serve as key resources. Students can easily save, share and revisit these materials as they progress through the module, facilitating an iterative and reflective design process. These preserved outputs seamlessly feed into staged assessment submissions, often alongside analyses and reflections. This ability to easily revisit and build upon previous work contrasts with the potentially transient nature of paper-based workshops and supports the iterative refinement central to design thinking. The digital format captures the evolution of a design, enabling metacognitive reflection on students' growing understanding.

Third, the asynchronous digital format offers considerable *flexibility* in terms of timing and location. This is particularly advantageous for postgraduate students who frequently balance their studies with professional work, family commitments, or reside in different time zones. While time constraints are strategically used for certain activities to maintain creative focus, the overall asynchronous structure allows students to engage with activities, like the 'tweet' exercise or initial storyboard drafting, in a way that aligns with their individual contexts and schedules. This flexibility is consistently cited as a major advantage of online and asynchronous learning, accommodating diverse student needs and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the ABC approach provides a straightforward and pragmatic entry point to the underpinning theoretical framework. The six learning types derived from Laurillard's Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2002) are intuitive and easily understandable, resonating with common teaching practices. Starting the module with the practical application of these types, through the ABC activities, offers an accessible way for students to begin exploring the complexities of learning design, before needing to delve deeper into the Conversational Framework for their final assignment. The methodology seamlessly integrates with their increasing level of detail, complexity and depth of understanding, as the module progresses.

While powerful as a rapid design method on its own, ABC exhibits significant compatibility and integration with other learning design models, frameworks and tools commonly used in higher education, so it is

important for students to understand its specific place and contribution. As discussed earlier, regarding its positioning, ABC primarily addresses the meso-level storyboarding and sequencing stages of course design. Its conceptual connection to tools like the UCL Learning Designer is strong, as both are underpinned by Laurillard's Conversational Framework, which allows for a relatively seamless transition where educators and students can take the initial, rapid storyboard designs developed during an ABC workshop and elaborate upon them by adding detailed specifications for learning activities within the Learning Designer platform. This detailed design phase within Learning Designer then enables further technical integration, such as exporting structured information for use in virtual learning environments, like Moodle. The ABC storyboard effectively serves as a conceptual blueprint that guides this subsequent, more granular design and development work, rather than being directly technically integrated itself. Understanding this flow helps students contextualise ABC within a broader, multi-stage design process and appreciate its relationship with complementary tools and theoretical underpinnings.

Challenges and pragmatic considerations

Despite the pedagogical benefits, the implementation of asynchronous digital ABC workshops within a postgraduate module presents certain challenges that require careful planning and management. Typical educational logistics need thoughtful consideration, particularly concerning group work, timing and workload. Dividing students into small groups for activities like showcasing and discussing their storyboards requires attention to group dynamics and potentially accommodating diverse time zones or mixes of online and in-person participants. Clear timelines and realistic workload expectations are essential for asynchronous activities to prevent student overwhelm and ensure timely engagement. Asynchronous environments can sometimes make it harder to gauge participation levels evenly, across the group, potentially leading to issues like 'social loafing' or uneven contributions, if not managed (Gabelica et al. 2021). Research consistently points to coordination, motivation and time management as key hurdles in online group settings.

The reliance on specific external digital tools, such as Mural in this case, for storyboarding, introduces challenges related to technology access and usability. A primary concern is ensuring digital accessibility

for all students. While a tool like Mural allows access via existing university logins and has readily available templates, greatly minimising training needs, its use cannot be mandated if students encounter accessibility barriers, as institutions have legal and ethical obligations to ensure that all digital tools and course materials are accessible to all students. This means planning for contingencies and providing accessible alternatives for students who cannot or do not want to use the primary tool. The paper-based version of ABC can provide a fallback, as can institutionally supported tools like MS Planner or MS Whiteboard, although these alternatives are inferior. While ABC's focus on varied learning types aligns conceptually with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (as discussed in [Chapter 4](#)) by encouraging diverse activities, ensuring that the *means* of engagement, that is, the digital tools and materials themselves, are accessible, available and ethical, for example in terms of data protection, are practical implementation challenges that require review when using non-institutional platforms.

Furthermore, the lack of immediate, synchronous face-to-face interaction necessitates clear, comprehensive instructions and effective online facilitation to maintain the workshop's collaborative spirit. Replicating the spontaneous energy or 'buzz' of an in-person workshop can be difficult asynchronously, so a conscious effort across behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions is needed, to maintain student engagement and to foster a sense of community and support. Experience also highlights the importance of pre-activity engagement tasks, such as encouraging students to reflect on learning outcomes or module visions beforehand, to enhance preparedness and contribution quality. Providing exceptionally clear instructions for each asynchronous step and ensuring ongoing, visible facilitation through online forums or other communication channels is vital for guidance and support.

Conclusion: the ongoing evolution of ABC in teaching

The digital adaptation of the ABC Learning Design workshop has proven to be a valuable and effective approach for teaching learning design within a postgraduate online module. Its key benefits include its efficiency in providing a rapid overview of curriculum design, its flexibility in the asynchronous format accommodating diverse student needs, the provision of an authentic learning experience, and its strong alignment with established pedagogical frameworks such as Laurillard's Conversational Framework. By engaging with the digital ABC workshop,

students gain practical experience with a real-world methodology, develop a deeper understanding of learning design principles and create tangible, preservable outputs that can be further refined and implemented.

Looking beyond the specific context of learning design, the ABC methodology holds potential as a reflective instrument for both teachers and students across various subject areas. By engaging with the six learning types and the process of designing a teaching episode, students can gain a deeper understanding of how learning occurs and how it can be facilitated, essentially getting them to design the teaching of any given subject matter. This can be a powerful tool for improving conceptual understanding and fostering a more metacognitive approach to learning.

While challenges exist related to online collaboration, maintaining engagement, workload management and ensuring tool accessibility, these can be mitigated effectively through careful planning, clear communication, proactive facilitation and the utilisation of appropriate digital resources, which includes the asynchronous deconstruction of the ABC workshop. However, the key point of the ABC methodology is preserved as a crucial starting point, rather than the final destination in the journey of learning design. It powerfully initiates pedagogical conversations, provides a foundational framework for curriculum development that is quick and easy to adopt, and it empowers educators and students alike to think critically and creatively about the design of effective learning experiences.

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An ABC of co-design methodology: collaborative professional learning in challenging environments

Eileen Kennedy

Introduction

Online solutions can contribute to most of the challenging problems in the world, so it is imperative that professionals in all walks of life should be able to think through ‘how can technology help?’, no matter what their field. One area that online learning can certainly contribute to is the global need for continuous large-scale professional development. This chapter explores the kind of co-design workshop that addresses this common challenge, with a common potential solution, that is, how to build large-scale online courses with and for professionals. The model proposed here is robust because it has been tested for contexts and professional communities that face some of the greatest difficulties anywhere.

The chapter explains the co-design methodology that researchers from the RELIEF Centre (now PROCOL Lebanon) have been using to work with teachers and teacher educators in Lebanon and Thailand to co-produce digital connected learning experiences for continuing professional development. Co-design is a term that has been used in many contexts and can have many meanings. At RELIEF, where our mission was to experiment with digital pedagogy to support educators in challenging environments, we aimed not only to involve collaborators in design, but to reach a stage where the outputs were fundamentally co-owned. During this process, we have worked with academics at public and private universities, and a host of teachers at public and private and education-focused non-governmental organisation (NGO) schools. As this chapter explains, the learning types of the Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2012) and elements of the ABC workshop have enabled us to

establish a shared language, where researchers and stakeholders can communicate the knowledge we are each bringing to the collaborative project. The ABC acronym makes sense in this context. We have set out to co-design active learning experiences that can be blended into multiple contexts. Moreover, *connected* learning is a much-used term for digital learning in the kind of crisis contexts in which we have been working. In our case the ABC workshop is part of the broader methodology for another ‘c’: co-design. The chapter demonstrates how the ABC workshop features in this approach and the role it can play to ensure that the always knowledgeable and committed global community of professionals, no matter what their field, could collaborate to exchange, critique and develop new knowledge, online and on the large scale.

Workshopping digital solutions for the most challenging contexts

In January 2018, RELIEF Centre researchers¹ initiated a co-design research project, with educators in Lebanon, to explore the ways that massive open online courses (MOOCs) might support the learning needs of their communities. Lebanon is in the grip of multiple crises. Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita (UNHCR 2022) and following the devastating conflict with Israel, there are currently more than a million internally displaced people in the country (Centre for Lebanese Studies 2024). In contexts of mass displacement, teachers are always in short supply and the need for teacher professional development (TPD) is constant (Burns and Lawrie 2015). In these contexts, TPD can support teachers to become key agents of change for displaced communities, and support children and young people to prosper both inside and outside the classroom (Pherali et al. 2020). However, because of the scale of demand, what is needed is large-scale access to quality TPD. Through co-design, the RELIEF/PROCOL Lebanon project proposed to find innovative online solutions to pressing education problems, since it is only through these digital means (Laurillard and Kennedy 2017) that we can begin to reach the scale required.

In low-resourced environments, there is a widespread and understandable hesitation about the applicability of technological innovations. In Lebanon, for example, access to energy and internet is always unreliable. Yet, on our first visit to the Syrian refugee-led NGO in Beqaa, MAPs, we found a group of dedicated teachers who were already studying online and who were enthusiastic in joining us to co-design

online learning for teachers like themselves. They saw the potential of digital media for providing access to quality education.

At the commencement of the project, we ran workshops in Lebanon that drew together teachers and teacher educators from refugee education-focused NGOs, universities, government and official teacher training organisations. Despite their focus on different sectors of education the workshop participants were open to collaborate with each other. Our subsequent co-design workshops saw the Lebanese American University (LAU), a private university, host faculty from Lebanon's only public university (The Lebanese University) for the first time, as reported by participants. Teacher educators, from both the private and public sectors, collaborated with teacher educators from the informal, NGO sector. These collaborations confounded the early warnings we received that such a thing would never happen.

These workshops enabled us to identify outline curricula for two online courses in community-based research and teacher education. Between them these two areas addressed participants' keenly held beliefs that teachers in contexts of mass displacement could conceive of themselves as researchers, seeing their classrooms as laboratories, and exerting agency to make positive change for vulnerable learners. As researchers from the Global North, we wanted to learn from our colleagues who had been working in TPD in Lebanon across the multiple contexts they represented. They, in turn, were interested in learning more about digital methods and research in TPD in crisis contexts. The workshops and the co-design project overall enabled the kind of co-learning that is necessary for equitable research.

However, while our participants' mutual interest in digital methods motivated their engagement, it soon became clear that online learning meant many different things to different people. Some of our participants had studied online, but not on open platforms. Some equated accessing static resources on websites to online learning. Some had enrolled in MOOCs composed only of videos of 'talking heads', and saw that as equivalent to all varieties of online learning. Few had experienced social and collaborative learning online. A major challenge, therefore, was to establish a shared vision for the courses.

Establishing a shared vision

Feedback from the workshops in Lebanon identified factors that were critical to the success of the project. Participants valued the way MOOCs

could provide flexible access and support the sharing of research and insights. There was enthusiasm for digital technology, but also concern that the infrastructure and skills were not sufficiently shared among the target group. As a result, there was strong support for blended versions of the courses, to address the needs of teachers who would not be able to study independently (see Kennedy and Laurillard 2019, for details). Following the workshops, we synthesised participants' responses into a co-design approach that would use workshops to engage members of our target audience to collaborate with us, to clarify the concept of a course and develop its main curriculum and content.

We undertook, therefore, to co-design a collaborative online learning experience for teachers and other professionals in contexts of mass displacement, where participants could share their knowledge of what works in practice. By engaging multiple stakeholders in the co-design process, we could find opportunities to identify significant exemplars and create video case-studies of professionals discussing their work, making sure the learning was applied and practical, and tailored to the specific needs of the community. We wanted our course to run at scale, in order to address the extent of the need for teachers in the contexts of mass displacement. For that we needed MOOC platforms, because they are open to the world and have the marketing networks to bring in the numbers of participants we wanted to reach.

However, while we were using MOOC platforms, we departed from a traditional MOOC approach by putting a social and collaborative learning design at the heart of our vision, thereby extending the co-design of learning to the participants who joined the course. So we coined a new term for what we were doing: co-designed massive open online collaboration or CoMOOC. This term emphasises the co-design process for development and the opportunity for community knowledge exchange within the eventual courses. Although we were addressing problems common to professionals in similar circumstances across the world, to address the very different cultural contexts, it was essential that we enabled participants to adapt the generic solutions to embed them appropriately into their own professional development activities. With these open, adaptive and collaborative features in the courses, it was feasible to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the courses, which was all-important, given the nature of short-term research funding.

Overall the methodology constitutes a particular 'Theory of Change' (Arensman et al. 2018) with five stages (see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Co-design theory of change

Engage	Initial workshops build ownership and understanding, using existing work, to clarify concept. Co-designed plans facilitate teachers' digital engagement.
Develop	Workshops to co-design content and represent localised issues. Digital collaboration across countries engages local partners.
Extend	MOOC launched in multiple languages to improve global access to free resource. MOOC orchestrates collaboration across many contexts of mass displacement, and across public, private, NGO sectors.
Embed	MOOC becomes core element of co-design partners' existing TPD activities. Digital capabilities of co-design partners developed and supported.
Sustain	Sustainability improves through co-design partners' expertise and capacity for developing existing and new MOOC initiatives.

Source: © Author

The challenge for CoMOOC co-design

Following the initial 'engage' stage (the workshops in Lebanon), we needed a way of actively involving the multiple stakeholders in the co-design and co-production of the CoMOOCs. Co-design methods can bring together different knowledges and share project planning and production between researchers, practitioners and communities. How this is done exactly, and the degree of responsibility and power sharing that it involves, can vary vastly in its implementation (Iniesto et al. 2022). Coming from the perspective of human–computer interaction, Dodero et al. (2014, 708) define co-design as a process that 'allows us to create a shared language between users and designers, so as to understand the new product from the point of view of all participants'. In our case, the 'product' is a CoMOOC – in terms of the curriculum (the topics), the learning design (the pedagogy) and the content (the eventual instantiation). Co-design methods typically involve workshops and feedback events and/or social science research methods such as interviews and observations (Iniesto et al. 2022).

Our approach is also heavily influenced by community-based research, where 'team members learn from each other and engage in bi-directional feedback and conversation' (Ubri et al. 2024, 6). This approach prioritises 'capacity bridging', where the dialogue and exchange of knowledge allows researchers and community members opportunities to find common ground before moving forward respectfully, to do research in 'a good way' (Amirault et al. 2018, par. 7).

There were multiple challenges for co-design for CoMOOCs. Working from the principle that members of a community are best positioned to know what the community needs, we required the co-design process to support our stakeholders to feel comfortable enough to share their knowledge of teaching and teacher development in contexts of mass displacement. As researchers, we needed to learn about the context and whether and how digital methods would help. There were also specific challenges for the co-design process – we needed to:

- enable a range of stakeholders to feel part of the co-design
- establish a shared sense of ownership of the CoMOOC
- include stakeholders with very limited time commitment
- create a space of mutual trust and respect for exchanging knowledge
- include stakeholders with limited experience of online learning design
- include stakeholders with limited experience of technology for learning
- ensure a practical outcome including learning design and curriculum/content map
- support stakeholders to facilitate further content co-production.

To achieve this, we needed a practical method for facilitating a range of people with different skills and experience to contribute to the co-design of the CoMOOC. We wanted to stimulate ‘design thinking’ (Cross 2011) among stakeholders who knew very well the challenges teachers faced in their environments, and how they supported them in person, but who perhaps had never learnt online, or were unfamiliar with online pedagogy, or had limited experience of using digital technologies for learning. On our side, within our research team we had an understanding of pedagogy and technology, and the principles of teacher education in settings of mass displacement, but we did not know the local context of how teachers were using technology, or responding to problems in their learning environment and finding their own creative solutions. We did know, however, that this contextualised knowledge would be key to the success of the project.

We required the workshops to ensure all participants would be able to exchange ideas and understand each other so that we could all take an active part in the co-design process. This requires capacity bridging, a concept that extends the notion of capacity building to acknowledge ‘the reciprocity of knowledge sharing between academics, researchers, community-based researchers, and individuals – so that all members are learning from each other’ (Ubri et al. 2024, 6). The stakeholders were

our bridge to the community expertise that would be the basis of the CoMOOC, and if we could find a way to bridge stakeholders' capacity in online learning design, we hoped that they would feel able to participate in the project as fully as possible.

At the beginning of the 'develop' stage, therefore, we drew on the ABC workshop (Young and Perović 2016), to create a workshop that would achieve these objectives. The next section provides an account of our co-design workshop and explains how we used the ABC materials within it.

ABC cards as boundary objects

The ABC workshop approach provides tools that enable the capacity bridging we were looking for. The approach draws on the Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2012), which provides an educator with a practical foundation for designing quality learning. Quality learning involves the creation of a learning environment that supports cycles of interaction between teacher, learner, other learners and the subject learning environment. This means that learners are able to: (1) acquire concepts; (2) enquire into those concepts, interrogating them, exploring and presenting them back to the teacher; (3) practise their use of the concept, and adjust their understanding with the aid of feedback; (4) articulate, discuss and negotiate meanings with each other; (5) build knowledge together with peers; and (6) finalise their knowledge products (in whatever form they come) ready for teacher evaluation (Kennedy and Laurillard 2024). Within the ABC workshop, these six learning types are printed on the face cards, where the reverse provides information about how to implement them through digital technology (see the Introduction to this volume).

As a physical object, the ABC cards provide something tangible for co-designers to hold onto and manipulate during a workshop, and it has been shown that representational artefacts like this can help create a shared language among diverse participants (Morrison and Dearden 2013). The cards act as a 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer 1989) because the learning types are easily recognised across different education contexts, but are flexible enough to be applied to participants' specific contexts (Kennedy and Laurillard 2024). For example, the stakeholders understood the types of learning from their different face-to-face practices, and were therefore able to translate this knowledge to the context of a CoMOOC.

The cards can build confidence in online pedagogic practice as their position on a storyboard can model the sequencing of learning types within a 'step' or 'unit' of a CoMOOC, to use the terminology preferred by FutureLearn, one of the learning platforms we have used. As such, in our co-design workshops, they are a bridge to enable participants to share their knowledge in a way that relates to the digital environment. The result is that all participants are able to learn from each other about the ways digital learning design could be applied in their contexts. The next section details the practical ways we have adapted the ABC workshop for our co-design process.

The ABC of CoMOOC workshops

Our first co-design workshop was held in London. We brought different stakeholders, from across the landscape of education provision in London, to UCL for three days. The first day provided an opportunity to redefine our learning aims and outcomes for the CoMOOC, and to exchange expertise, content and approaches. On the second day we began the learning content co-design process. Since this first workshop, we have run many subsequent workshops that have built on the approach we adopted early on, but always contained these three features – our ABC: Active learning, Blended learning, Co-design:

1. an introduction to learning types for representing active learning
2. a demonstration of technologies for supporting online and blended learning at scale
3. the practical co-design of an 'activity' for a CoMOOC for connected learning

As we refined the workshop design, the practical design dimension has evolved, but these features have remained.

Our workshops need to be inclusive and efficient to make the most of the limited time we have with stakeholders. We therefore begin our workshops with a short presentation about the Conversational Framework and the learning types, as a way of representing our teaching ideas. However, implementing the Conversational Framework within a CoMOOC is a complex and creative process, since the scale of a CoMOOC means that the kind of individual support that a teacher provides in other learning contexts (such as at a school or university) is not available. This means that social and collaborative learning become even

more important. CoMOOC participants need to motivate and encourage each other, provide peer feedback, share ideas and build community knowledge. However, social and collaborative learning can be under-emphasised by educators, since their focus is often the concepts they wish to communicate, and their capacity to do this as well as possible.

As a result, in combination with a presentation of learning types we provide examples of the way technologies can be used (with past examples – see El Moussaoui (2022) for illustrations) to support the learning types at scale. It is the combination of these two aspects – the concept of learning type with its implementation at scale that supports a shared understanding of what can be achieved during the workshop.

For example, to illustrate how acquisition can be supported in a CoMOOC, we would advise that videos do not need to feature academic experts but rather could enable teachers to talk about and demonstrate how they work in a classroom, to tackle problems they face. Similarly, we show how discussion can be part of a CoMOOC (with examples from different platforms) while emphasising the need for a detailed discussion prompt to stimulate quality exchange of ideas. For collaboration, the technologies we feature include tools to support the generation of word clouds, which work excellently at scale, and Padlet (the simple-to-use online pinboard) to support collective knowledge building. Practice can take many forms, but we illustrate this with examples of exercises where participants share the output of their practice online to support a sense of community. Enquiry is arguably the most straightforward to implement at scale online (adding links to explore, for example) and individual production activities are usually restricted to submitting a short assignment for peer review, since it is difficult to find teacher time for assessment.

The combination of conceptual understanding and practical examples can be presented in around 30 minutes. Within our co-design workshop, we follow the presentation with a practical design activity. The design activity is run in groups of around five participants, and the groups are invited to design one ‘activity’ in the CoMOOC. An activity is understood as a sequence of around three ‘steps’ (or units) of content. The choice of a limited scope for design was made because of the complexity of the activity. We are interested in suggestions for activities the groups can make, but we are also wary of overburdening them and losing their goodwill.

In the design activity, the learning types are able to support participants to put their conceptual understanding into practice, while also reminding them of the concepts and examples. Where possible, we

have adapted the cards to bring the technology choices available on the reverse of the cards to align as closely as possible to those available on the platform (both embedded or as external add-ins, for example, discussion forum and Padlet).

In our first co-design workshop we used the full ABC storyboard, but in subsequent workshops we altered this to reflect the learning environment of a MOOC platform. For example, we included the content types required by the platform on the storyboard (video, discussion, exercise and so on) for participants to select. In a different version, where we were unsure about the affordances of the room we would be working in, we created a smaller A3 storyboard, divided into three columns for steps on the horizontal plane with space for three learning types cards beneath (an example of the storyboard is available in our online repository²). Focusing on one three-step activity only is also more appropriate in terms of the work we are asking participants to do, and can still provide a clear picture of innovative teaching practice in our participants' contexts.

At the end of the workshop, following group presentations of their designs, we collect the storyboards and/or photograph them for our records. Typically, we then use the Learning Designer tool (see [Chapter 6](#)) to develop and represent the learning activities for each week. For this to work well, we need as much detail as possible. In one version of our workshop, therefore, we redesigned the back of the learning types card with the CoMOOC technologies on one side, and the other left blank for notes. In a recent workshop, with members of the Myanmar migrant and refugee education community in Thailand, participants worked directly on flip-chart paper, rather than a storyboard, which provided more space for writing the detail of their designs. The cards were a support for participants' design thinking and they were able to sequence their ideas without a predefined template.

The focus on learning design has enabled us to implement a comparable learning experience on different platforms despite the platforms' different technical features. This is because we start with social and collaborative learning rather than feel constrained by the limitations of the platform. Where we bump up against problems implementing the design, for example, when the platform does not provide tools for discussion or collaboration, we supplement the platform capabilities by embedding external tools such as word clouds, polling tools and digital pinboards (see El Moussaoui [2022](#), for illustrations).

While the co-design workshops have largely been conducted in person, we have also run these events online, and for some participants

this has been seen as an advantage. During the pandemic, co-design workshops for staff at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and for the charity, Keeping Children Safe, supported these organisations in moving their teaching online, with highly productive outcomes. At LAU, the participants in our workshops led the university's online response (Akle et al. 2021), and Keeping Children Safe now have a portfolio of online courses that follow a social and collaborative learning design (see Keeping Children Safe online courses³). For these purposes, we developed a Miro-based virtual workshop that we made available for reuse.⁴ The Miro storyboard mirrors the Learning Designer closely, to facilitate the transfer and development process.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the role that the ABC workshop can play in capacity bridging, enabling co-designers to use a shared language to represent their teaching ideas while enabling researchers, teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate, despite their different knowledges, experience and contexts. The learning types cards help workshop participants to communicate visually and verbally. A key outcome from this stage of co-design is to facilitate the sharing of practice, so all the co-designers can listen to each other and build on each other's ideas. For example, for RELIEF researchers, the activities designed by workshop participants brought to life examples from local practice that could be embedded in the CoMOOC. For workshop participants, the language of the Conversational Framework helped them to visualise how their current teacher development activities could be reimaged for active learning in online and blended modalities. In these ways the ABC workshop is an important part of the CoMOOC development process.

Notes

- 1 The researchers also involved in the co-design workshops include Mai Abu Moghli, Elaine Chase, Rym El Moussaoui, Diana Laurillard, Tejendra Pherali, Maha Shuayb, Gabi Witthaus and Samar Zeitoun.
- 2 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16570228>.
- 3 <https://tinyurl.com/3k9784kp>.
- 4 <https://miro.com/miroverse/co-design-storyboard/>.

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ABC Learning Design in schools: scaling up professional development in learning design

François Jourde and Jacques Dubois

Introduction

Teaching is a ‘design profession’ (Tricot 2017), regardless of the educational level (pre-school, primary, secondary, higher education, vocational training). In addition to academic planning over various durations, educators have to design, implement and adapt learning situations, particularly pedagogical scenarios. The aim is always to enable learners to learn through diversified and structured tasks (see the Conversational Framework proposed by Laurillard 2012).

This need is particularly evident in France, where teaching methods can appear insufficiently varied. For example, France stood out in the 2018 PISA survey (OECD 2019) for its low rate of cooperation between students (with students reporting less collaborative problem-solving and peer support), lack of teacher support and individualised feedback from teachers. Students’ perception that their teachers generally do little to help them improve was also documented (OECD 2019; Mons and Butzbach 2022). Teaching in France is also more focused on ‘vertical methods of transmitting knowledge, with little room for cooperative group or project work’ (Algan et al. 2018). For these reasons, teachers and trainers in France need to build capacity in methods and tools adapted to learner-centred approaches. Although it was originally designed for use in higher education contexts, the ABC method is proving to be an effective lingua franca, in primary and secondary school cycles, and for vocational training.

An experiment in the context of Magistère

Magistère¹ is a continuing education programme for teachers and educational staff employed by the French Ministry of Education (K-12). It includes:

- a core group of 250 trainers for ongoing training
- a common platform (based on Moodle) that evolves and adapts continuously
- a range of shared training courses developed in a bottom-up strategy
- open access to all staff of the French National Ministry of Education

A panel of this ‘core group’ is invited each year to take part in a national training and reflection seminar. A seminar focusing on learning design was held in Paris on 6–7 October 2022, and was attended by 120 people. Its main objective was to develop the skills trainers need for learning design and to provide them with suitable tools. Following the seminar, it was intended that participants should:

- know how to use the ABC method to design learning scenarios, independently and effectively, for teaching and training purposes
- understand how a digital interface for learning design can enhance ABC visualisation, by opening new perspectives and facilitating the optimisation of learning scenarios
- disseminate this method throughout the country to familiarise educational teams with learning design concepts and practices

The context was also determined by the need to test new functionalities of the digital interface with key players before their integration into the Magistère training platform. This platform must both keep pace with technical developments in Moodle and respond to the ministry’s strategic choices regarding continuing education. In this chapter we discuss how we adapted the ABC cards and developed a digital design tool, to extend the ABC approach, as well as the evaluation of these resources, gathered from attendees at our learning design seminar.

Exploration of learning design tools

Adaptation of the ABC cards

As the target audience consists exclusively of Magistère trainers working on the Magistère learning management system, we have adapted the

	Acquisition	
	Activities	Tools
in person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend an expert conference • Take notes, memorise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Etherpad
remote synchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend a web conference • Attend a virtual class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videodiff • Virtual classroom
remote asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and annotate documents • Take notes, support reflection • Assess oneself, position oneself • Assess understanding • Connect with existing knowledge, listen to podcasts • Watch animations and videos, consult a glossary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDF annotation • Logbook • Questionnaire • Test • Interactive HSP content • Centralised resource • Lesson • Book • SCORM package • Glossary on M@gistère • Tube.ac-amiens.fr • Dailymotion • YouTube

Figure 10.1 Adapted ABC acquisition card. *Source:* © Authors.

reverse side of the cards to suit this context better (see [Figure 10.1](#); the original is in French).

We aimed to focus directly on the online activities rather than on the transposition from conventional to digital technology (the two original columns on the reverse of the cards). For this reason, we adapted the reverse side of the cards to reflect exclusively the activity types available on the Moodle-based digital learning platform. For example, the ‘discussion’ card lists Moodle activities like forums or chats that align with that type of learning. Therefore, trainers can clearly see how each Moodle activity fits within the ABC framework. The aim was to promote a rich variety of activities in online training modules aligned with learning objectives and assessments.

Similarly, we decided to organise the list of activities according to two dimensions: in person/online and synchronous/asynchronous. These modalities are commonly used, blended and highly structured for the learning design.

Online Learning Designer suite (prototype)

Online digital tools are already available for implementing learning design. A paradigmatic example is the UCL Learning Designer tool (see [Chapter 6](#) for more details). Since 2013, the learning design community

has recognised the value of this advanced tool. The UCL Learning Designer enriches the potential of visualisation of the learning journey, using various dynamic statistical graphics (building on the maps and storyboards of the classic version of ABC). It also facilitates design in iterative mode by enabling a strong connection between storyboarding and visualisation. Furthermore, it can facilitate cooperation and sharing between designers, even when working in distributed or asynchronous ways. However, the Learning Designer tool has limitations: its interface is not multilingual (offering only English and Greek) and cannot be extended to include customisable dimensions and parameters.

Therefore, it's interesting and pragmatic to prototype a tool combining the flexibility of an online spreadsheet with the richness of an on-demand, configurable dashboard interface (Jourde and Gallenne 2020). Such a prototype can serve as a proof of concept for digitally-assisted learning design, particularly in the ABC approach.

This Learning Designer suite uses two interfaces.² The first interface is for creating the learning scenario, by encoding various data. The second interface is for graphically and dynamically visualising the proposed data. In the first interface, the learning scenario is encoded in a spreadsheet. While the rows represent the steps of the scenario, the columns represent each step's diverse dimensions and parameters. This structuring makes it possible to integrate the basic parameters of the ABC method (duration, grouping, online/in-person, assessment and so on). It allows adding other dimensions, in real time, according to needs and contexts (such as teacher and student workload, physical setting like classroom or laboratory). Similarly, one can easily add reference frameworks and taxonomies: Bloom's taxonomy, which classifies learning objectives (or outcomes) into levels of complexity and mastery (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001); SOLO (structure of observed learning outcomes), describing levels of increasing understanding from simple to complex (Biggs and Collis 1982); DigComp (European Union's Digital Competence Framework), which defines key digital skills (Vuorikari et al. 2016); TPACK (technological, pedagogical, content knowledge), for integrating technology, pedagogy and content knowledge in teaching (Koehler and Mishra 2009); SAMR (substitution, augmentation, modification, redefinition), which outlines levels of integrating technology into teaching (see Hamilton et al. 2016); and ICAP (interactive, constructive, active, passive), which categorises types of student engagement and their impact on learning outcomes (Chi and Wylie 2014). Using an online Office suite allows learning designers to collaborate remotely and easily share and duplicate their

work. It is possible to create drop-down menus with pre-encoded values for streamlining and standardisation. These values can be customised and refined to suit any specific context. The educators thus benefit from a versatile working environment that can be adapted to all learning situations. The spreadsheet also allows advanced users to adjust the information display to their needs, by hiding and moving columns (even if a more simplified interface than a spreadsheet should be better suited to the average user).³

In the second interface, the overall characteristics of the learning design are visualised at a glance. The interface allows various visualisations.⁴ It can be used with one-dimensional graphs, to identify the distribution of a single variable according to all its possible values. It can also be used with multi-dimensional graphs, to represent the evolution of a variable over time. In the prototype suite, a PHP script (server-side code to generate dynamic online content) creates a dynamic link between the spreadsheet and the visualisation interface. It retrieves data from the spreadsheet (provided as a transferable .csv file), which it displays visually, according to the user's choices. Below is a description of the main visualisations:

- The timeline view shows the temporal distribution of a parameter. For example, the distribution of each type of learning (the lengths of the blocks correspond to the duration of each activity).
- The graph is used to show how numerical parameters change over time. This could be the teacher's workload regarding design, production and orchestration of learning activities. This requires the values estimated for each activity to be calibrated beforehand by the learning designer: for example, in the case of assessment work by the teacher, correcting an essay could be considered the maximum workload, whereas correcting a multiple-choice quiz would be the minimum. This visualisation makes apparent the dimensions of the work of teachers and students that would otherwise be inaccessible or barely accessible.

Each dashboard can be shared via a public link. Viewers cannot access the spreadsheet, but can display the dashboard. They can even edit it to match their needs. The two views are independent, as the public link is a copy of the original dashboard.

An interesting potential of this feature is the ability to create and share links to dashboards adapted to different audiences. For example, the student view could focus on exams and milestones; it could also be

differentiated according to profiles or groups, and the management view could present the occupations of the classes.

Learning design seminar

The session began by introducing participants to the ABC method and continued with a workshop to test the affordances of a digital learning design tool.

The day was organised in several stages:

1. Plenary session: a general introduction to the ABC method and its theoretical framework was followed by a general presentation of the Learning Designer suite prototype (the spreadsheet and graphical interface).
2. In sub-groups, participants tried the ABC method: handling physical artefacts (cards and storyboards) to get to grips with the method's principles and focusing on collaborative storyboarding. The aim was to highlight the toolkit's value in visualising the qualities of a constructed learning design. For efficiency, the learning event to be designed as the basis for the activity was the actual training day. Participants were invited to reconstruct this learning design on their storyboards.
3. In subgroups, the prototype digital tool was used to reproduce the main dimensions of ABC. The aim was to demonstrate the value of using digitised data and visualisation possibilities in learning design. Participants continued to work on the same scenario, which was supplied in a prefilled spreadsheet format (which is compatible with the visualisation tool). Participants considered the scenario's dimensions through the visual interface. They observed that the tool is extensible regarding activity characterisations (taxonomies and various parameters can be added to the spreadsheet) and visualisation possibilities (on-the-fly graphs can be produced from spreadsheet data). The tool worked iteratively, moving from scenario to visualisation and from visualisation to scenario as part of a continuous improvement process.
4. In large groups, a final debriefing session was held. Participants were invited to share their reactions and impressions after these hands-on sessions. They also had the opportunity to suggest improvements to the various tools presented.
5. A follow-up webinar was held 15 days after the event, to bring together the organisation team and participants.

Evaluation: benefits and challenges

ABC method and toolkit

ABC is well suited to the needs of teachers and trainers. Indeed, as the other chapters of this book show, ABC can facilitate the discussion and co-construction of learning experiences. This toolkit can support pedagogical inventiveness and generate varied and structured designs. It enables a group to clarify and challenge each other's thoughts, to verbalise and clarify them. It also allows for a design thinking approach, with short cycles of 'spirals of improvement' (Reich 2023), where educators can collaboratively and iteratively improve their learning designs.

The participants appreciated the collective design work with the ABC material. They saw real potential for the training for which they would be responsible. The advantages identified are numerous:

- the workshop is based on a solid foundation in educational theory
- the use of coloured cards means that the diversity of the activities on offer and the richness of the scenario can be seen at all times
- handling cards on a board generates a great deal of discussion, both about the vocabulary used and about the issues and objectives at stake
- the ABC method allows the discovery of new possibilities and encourages an investigative approach to new training methods
- it offers an opportunity for reflective analysis of the learning design process

ABC is, therefore, a highly suitable format for initiating and leading the initial design of a training course. It helps to build a common vocabulary, clarify objectives and unite the group around a shared vision of the training. It also provides an opportunity to step back and reflect on the training. It invites participants to focus not on the tool, but the objectives and the learning activities. It separates the design phase from the implementation phase of a training scenario.

However, ABC, as it was used during this workshop, has certain limitations, as the participants were able to express through the following feedback and proposals:

- Decouple the front and back of the cards. We had proposed cards with a list of Moodle activities, corresponding to each type of learning, on the reverse side. This seemed restrictive for some participants. Some participants suggested separating the front and

back of the cards and proposing independent ‘activity’ cards to free themselves from constraint. These cards could integrate Moodle activities and offline activities, in class or out of class. It should be noted, however, that the classic ABC avoids the sense that a limited set of activities is available. The classic cards contain a number of suggestions for classroom and online activities (some can be done in Moodle or another virtual learning environment, some are face-to-face or, with other tools, some are asynchronous). Participants are told that these are suggestions but that they can add other possibilities. This feedback led us to believe that listing Moodle activities on the back of the cards tends to merge the overall storyboarding with the detailed design, which typically comes later.

- Explain the objectives. The storyboard we proposed should have explicitly displayed the learning objectives we were aiming for. In the workshop context, this posed a problem for some participants, who needed help linking the cards to clear objectives. The workshop trainer must never forget that declaring learning objectives is fundamental to instructional design.
- Need for a minimal lexicon. The categorisation into six types of learning was problematic for some. To avoid viewing the framework as arbitrary, some participants emphasised the importance of having precise definitions for each type of learning. Again, the workshop trainer must always inform the participants that they can superimpose several cards to characterise the learning sequences.

The ABC method with digital prototype

The digital prototype, consisting of a scripting spreadsheet and a dashboard, offers some interesting possibilities. Here are the main advantages:

- The adaptability and extensibility of spreadsheet data mean that scripting can be anchored in the specific context of each team, drawing on references already mastered (taxonomies, repositories, learning models). Spreadsheets allowed the possibility of quickly and easily integrating new dimensions into a digital design record.
- The dashboard’s temporal visualisation summarises the different learning sequences and modalities. It makes it easy to identify the

relevance of their distribution and, if necessary, to better balance them.

- The digital format makes it easy to duplicate, share and collaborate about teaching scenarios online.

As with all prototypes, there's always room for improvement. Here are a few suggestions that emerged from the workshop:

- Hide the spreadsheet. Many participants perceive using a spreadsheet as arduous. Interfaces such as UCL's Learning Designer tool or tools like modulo.io⁵ session planner could make such a tool more straightforward to use.
- Parallel 'editable scenario' and 'graphical analysis' views. Participants appreciate the use of visualisations, which provide support for discussion within groups of learning designers. An integrated two-window interface, with one window for working on the scenario and another for visualisation, would enable 'live' feedback on the work carried out and the impact of each scenario element on the training. This would enable short cycles of improvement spirals.
- Consider a two-level interface. To adapt to each user's needs, it may be worth proposing an interface in two versions: a simplified version with just a few parameters and pre-established visualisations and a complete, open interface that extends the parameters and visualisation possibilities for advanced users.

Conclusion

The value of the ABC method was widely recognised at this workshop. However, it was also pointed out that, as ABC focuses on the spectrum of learning design, it should be accompanied by other methods and tools to cover the full range of curriculum design, for example the definition of learning objectives and outcomes or the analysis of context.

The workshop also helped us understand the usefulness of appropriating the ABC method through the physical toolkit, as a first step. This initial familiarisation can pave the way for using a scripting table (like a spreadsheet) and a visualisation interface (like a dashboard). A more integrated digital tool with a more ergonomic interface would enable almost immediate uptake.

Whatever the case, a design approach to pedagogical engineering is recognised as beneficial. In this context, the need for tools to organise

the essential components of pedagogical scripting and to visualise pedagogical designs is considered essential. This is one of the reasons why organisations such as the French Ministry of Education are committed to developing interfaces adapted to the different needs of learning design teams.

Notes

- 1 <https://magistere.apps.education.fr>.
- 2 <https://sites.google.com/view/learning-designer-suite>.
- 3 For an example of a learning scenario spreadsheet see <https://zenodo.org/records/15594326>.
- 4 For an example of a Learning Designer visualisation see <https://zenodo.org/records/15594339>.
- 5 <https://modulo.io/>.

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The ABC-LD@4EU+: enhanced version of the ABC Learning Design workshop tailored for the European University Alliance's needs

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Dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and colleague Bartek Michałowicz, whose presence enriched this work and whose absence is deeply felt.

Introduction

4EU+ is a European universities alliance in which eight research universities collaborate on current and future pedagogical implementations, research initiatives and solutions related to higher education pedagogy. In pursuit of fostering adaptability within the academic environment, we have introduced the ABC-LD@4EU+ training initiative, based on the ABC workshop, specifically designed to align with the alliance's strategic initiatives. Our previous experience of running ABC workshops, at our home universities, allowed us to identify our teachers' needs and adapt this training accordingly in order to meet the alliance's academic development objectives. The outcome reflects our ability to handle deep-thinking initiatives in the form of a hands-on workshop and therefore characterises our endeavour for future adaptability. Towards this goal, a new training package (known as ABC-LD@4EU+) was created, with digitised resources related to pedagogy. We designed pre-ABC training and linked it with the 4EU+ educational framework, by creating new materials on identified key teaching strategies and approaches. It was built on the Moodle platform, and we have integrated a collaborative

digital blackboard tool for running the practical workshop, allowing interactivity and collaboration among educators. This format not only enables easy engagement and flexibility, but also it ensures durable access to the pedagogical resources and design tools. We offer the ABC-LD@4EU+ tool as a sustainable and creative activity to develop an academic environment that considers contemporary and future requirements for twenty-first century education.

The ABC-LD@4EU+ training package

Introduction to the 4EU+ European University Alliance and the 4EU+ educational strategy

The 4EU+ Alliance, established in 2019 and co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme, represents a transnational strategic partnership formalised as a legal association under Belgian law. The creation of the 4EU+ Alliance is the result of the first Erasmus+ call launched by the European Commission for the establishment of European Universities, a landmark initiative aimed at fostering deeper cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe. This initiative reflects the Commission's vision to develop an integrated European Education Area, with universities acting as engines for excellence, innovation and societal transformation.

4EU+ brings together eight leading public, research-intensive European universities: Sorbonne University, University of Warsaw, University of Milan, Charles University, University of Heidelberg, University of Copenhagen, the University of Geneva and Paris-Panthéon-Assas University. The alliance strives to build a comprehensive research-intensive university by fostering deeper cooperation in education, research and administration. It strives to strengthen the European Education and Research Area by fostering mutual enrichment and integration, anchored in our core values: academic freedom, accessible higher education for all, a student-centred approach, diversity and inclusion, and service to society. To achieve this vision, we have developed a 4EU+ 2025–35 strategy, which focuses on broadening and deepening collaboration across four strategic domains: education, research, innovation and outreach. This comprehensive strategy will guide our efforts, driving our ambitions and reaffirming our commitment to shared progress and excellence. It reinforces the creation of an inter-university campus, positioning European university alliances as the universities of the future.

In the realm of education, our primary goal is to enhance the quality and efficiency of teaching and learning. We seek to create a transformative impact on academics and students alike, by developing a flexible, challenge-based educational framework. This framework incorporates research-based teaching, promotes multilingualism and maintains a strong global and European perspective. The backbone of this effort lies in our 4EU+ ‘flagships’, which are thematic areas led by professors and researchers addressing the key global and European challenges of our time. The framework also prioritises the cultivation of a 4EU+ student profile, characterised by open-mindedness, multilingualism, critical thinking, an entrepreneurial spirit, data literacy and social engagement.

The 4EU+ educational framework and 4EU+ initiatives for academic development

The 4EU+ Alliance developed the 4EU+ innovative education framework to enhance student learning, foster academic innovation and support the professional development of academic staff. This framework reflects the alliance’s broader policy and strategy, to advance high-quality, research-based education, while equipping educators with the tools to adopt and implement innovative teaching methods. A core goal is to encourage academic staff to embrace innovative pedagogical approaches when designing their educational activities, courses or programmes with a particular emphasis on creating student-centred learning pathways. These pathways are further enriched by mobility schemes that promote flexibility and international exposure.

A key element of this framework is the introduction of six pedagogical strategies and approaches: research-based education, transfer-oriented education, active learning, self-directed learning, intercultural and inclusive education, and critical thinking. These strategies not only guide academics in shaping their teaching but also ensure alignment with the broader 4EU+ vision of cultivating an adaptable, forward-thinking student experience. They provide educators with a dynamic, responsive roadmap to address student needs and global challenges effectively.

As part of its comprehensive support for academic development, the 4EU+ Alliance has undertaken several actions to empower educators, including the creation of a specific 4EU+ card set. Inspired by the ‘classic’ ABC cards, as described earlier in the book, these resources serve as quick-reference tools, offering practical suggestions for supporting academics in implementing the 4EU+ educational framework’s values in their teaching practices. Each card defines the pedagogical strategy

or approach, on one side, and lists, on the other, various teaching techniques – such as flipped classrooms or problem-based learning for research-based education, or one-minute papers and ‘fishbowl’ activities for promoting active learning. Additional resources, including explanatory videos and references, are provided, when relevant, to deepen understanding and enhance application.¹

Through these targeted actions and resources, the 4EU+ Alliance not only fosters innovation in teaching and learning but also strengthens the capacity of its academic staff, contributing to the development of a cohesive, transformative European educational landscape.

Developing the collaborative educational ABC-LD@4EU+ approach

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, the 4EU+ Alliance has positioned itself at the forefront of innovation, fostering collaborative educational approaches among its eight member universities. A standout activity has been the Activity Based Curriculum Learning Design (ABC-LD) training, originally developed by Nataša Perović and Clive Young from UCL, based on the pedagogic theory of Professor Diana Laurillard’s (2012) Conversational Framework. While the ABC workshop is widely recognised across Europe as a user-friendly and effective tool, its implementation within the 4EU+ Alliance required customisation, to address the unique needs and objectives of the alliance. This adaptability is facilitated by ABC-LD’s status as a shared Open Educational Resource (OER) under a CC BY NC SA licence, ensuring its accessibility and flexibility for diverse educational contexts.

Rather than merely adopting UCL’s model, the 4EU+ Alliance transformed and enriched the ABC-LD workshop, to reflect the diverse educational contexts and cultural nuances of its member institutions. This localisation was essential for creating a cross-institutional, shared educational framework, which now provides engaging, in-depth training for curriculum, programme and course design. It also aligns with the alliance’s broader academic development efforts, which have increasingly focused on strengthening pedagogical skills tailored to both online education and the unique cultural diversity of teaching and learning across partner institutions.

The ABC-LD training itself is an interactive, rapid-design methodology that helps academic teams to collaboratively plan learning experiences using flexible and visual storyboarding. It builds on prior experience gained through ABC workshops already in place at several 4EU+ universities, offering a foundation for collaborative course design.

Since 2017 universities such as the Sorbonne and Milan had already been adapting and enriching the workshop locally, with the University of Warsaw joining the following year. These experiences provided valuable insights, allowing the 4EU+ community to refine and adapt the ABC-LD framework to better serve its academic teams. By enhancing the original workshop model, the 4EU+ Alliance created a more robust training experience that encourages academic innovation while accommodating each institution's pedagogical diversity. The ABC workshop method was recognised as the most appropriate basis, allowing for modifications and adaptations to meet the collaborative and student-centred needs of innovative course or programme design in a rapid, activity-focused manner. The training facilitates transnational collaboration enabling educators from diverse backgrounds to work together effectively. Participants can design educational activities, aligned with the shared 4EU+ educational vision and framework, promoting an activity-based design that enhances participant motivation and engagement, by putting students at the centre of the learning process. This localisation involved a deep understanding of each institution's pedagogical and operational realities and demanded a common language and approach to the course design.

Key adaptations were made to align the original ABC workshop with the alliance's educational strategy and vision. These modifications involved integrating the original ABC cards and storyboard with new components, designed to connect the workshop more specifically to the 4EU+ educational strategy. A new set of cards was introduced to guide teachers in applying the 4EU+ principles, effectively bridging the gap between the learning outcomes of courses or study programmes and the ABC-LD cards. These adjustments provide participants with the tools and frameworks necessary to establish a shared understanding of pedagogical principles, thereby enhancing the overall coherence and relevance of the workshop within the context of the alliance's educational objectives.

The ABC-LD@4EU+ adaptation

While the traditional ABC-LD workshop emphasises direct practical application, using cards, we recognised the value of incorporating pedagogical inputs prior to the hands-on portion of the training. Several experienced facilitators, who had previously worked with ABC, identified the need for a preparatory phase to better equip the teaching staff with the tools and basic knowledge, streamlining the hands-on experience.

The ABC-LD@4EU+ training therefore adapts the elements of the original ABC workshop, enriched with further features to address key challenges in designing courses and programmes in different formats, face to face, blended and online.

The ABC cards were adapted to include additional indicators, such as students' time engagement, synchronicity and asynchronicity for facilitating blended course design. To cater to the 4EU+ multicultural and multilingual environment, the ECTS points system was added as a reference for measuring students' workload (Figure 11.1). A new version of the storyboard highlights the axes of synchronicity and asynchronicity, or those of face to face (on campus) or distance teaching (Figure 11.2). An Excel spreadsheet was also developed, allowing teams to consolidate course design elements, including the intended learning outcomes (ILO), the pedagogical activities they decided collaboratively, the evaluation activities and their types aligned with the ILOs, the students' time engagement, the indication of synchronicity and asynchronicity for the autonomous or collaborative work expected, as well as the indication of which digital tools to use.² These changes build on the Activity Based

Acquisition		
Conventional method	Time/timing	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> reading books, papers <input type="checkbox"/> listening to teacher presentations face-to-face, lectures <input type="checkbox"/> watching demonstrations, masterclasses <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> reading multimedia, websites, digital documents and resources <input type="checkbox"/> listening to podcasts, webcasts <input type="checkbox"/> watching animations, videos <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

The table includes icons for time engagement (clock) and synchronicity/asynchronicity (double-headed arrow) for both columns. A callout box labeled "Synchronous or asynchronous" points to the synchronicity icon in the Digital technology column.

Figure 11.1 The reverse of an ABC-LD card, enhanced with indicators for time engagement and the synchronicity. *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.



Figure 11.2 A storyboard proposing designers choose between on-campus and online, or synchronous and asynchronous activities. *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

Curriculum Design (ABCD) training, an extended version of ABC created by Sorbonne University in 2018.

We created a glossary of over 60 pedagogical terms, providing participants with a shared terminology and clarifying key concepts, like constructive alignment, summative and formative assessment, and intended learning outcomes, while offering concrete examples of their application (Figure 11.3). We equally introduced, through a flipped classroom model, Laurillard’s Conversational Framework and the six learning types, essential for effectively designing learning activities (Figure 11.4).

To further engage the participants, we included animations, puzzle games and interactive activities (Figure 11.5).

One of the main challenges was to align the ABC-LD training to the 4EU+ educational framework. To achieve this, we collaboratively identified six key pedagogical strategies and approaches: research-based education, transfer-oriented education, active learning, self-directed learning, intercultural and inclusive education, and critical thinking.³ This allows 4EU+ teachers to explore new methodologies and approaches, tailored for international education course design, and equip 4EU+ students with the skills and competencies for effective learning. Following the model of the ABC-LD cards, we include the six

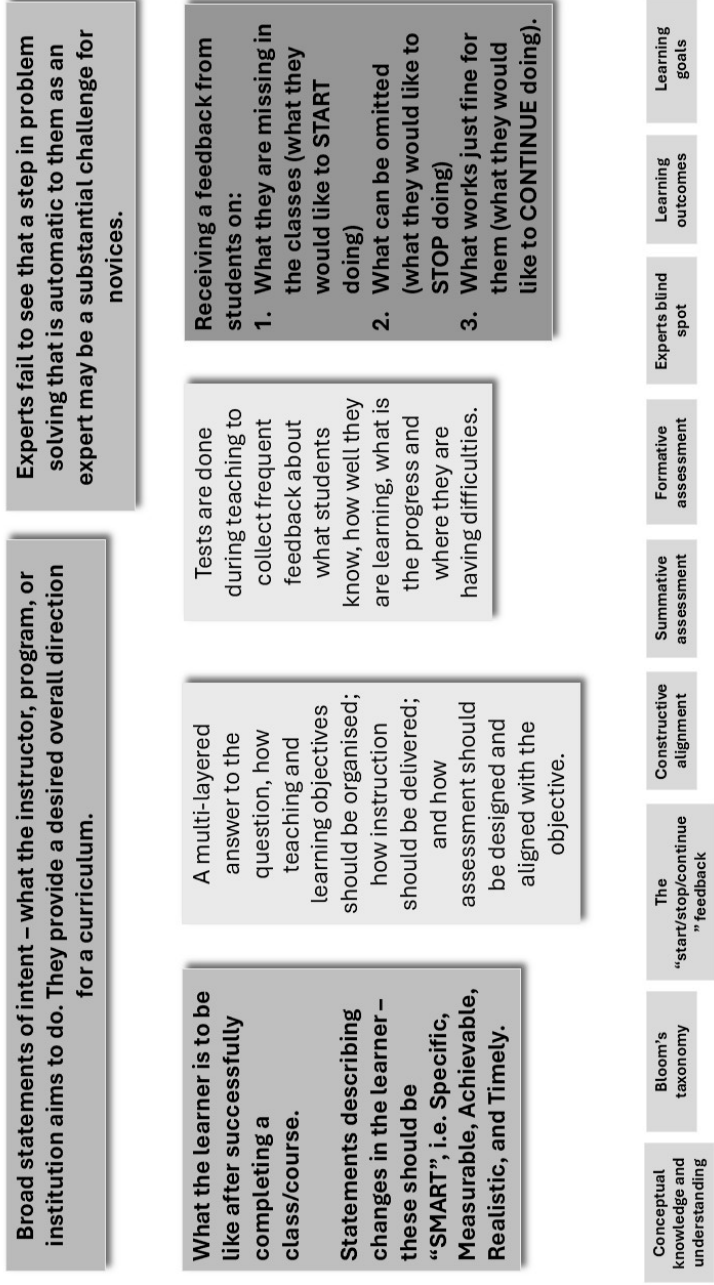


Figure 11.3 Section of activities available in the glossary included in the ABC-LD@4EU+ training on Moodle. *Source:* A derivative of 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

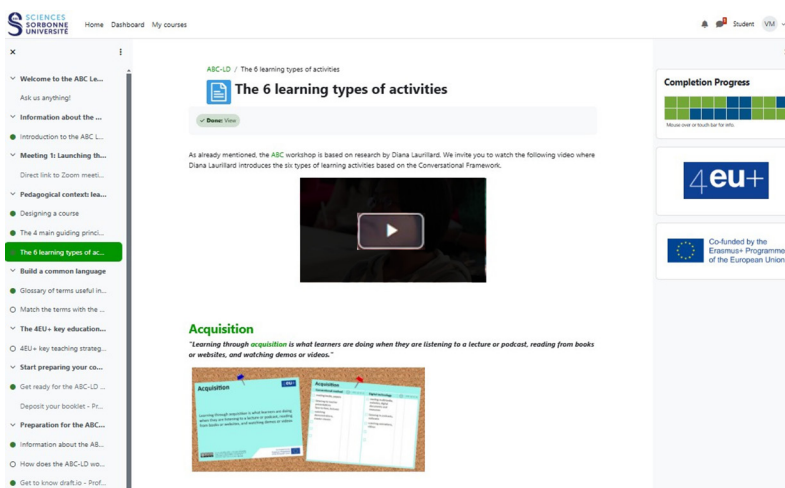


Figure 11.4 Examples of activities included in the ABC-LD@4EU+ training on Moodle. Presentation of the six learning types of activities. *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

The 4 main axes of the ABC method

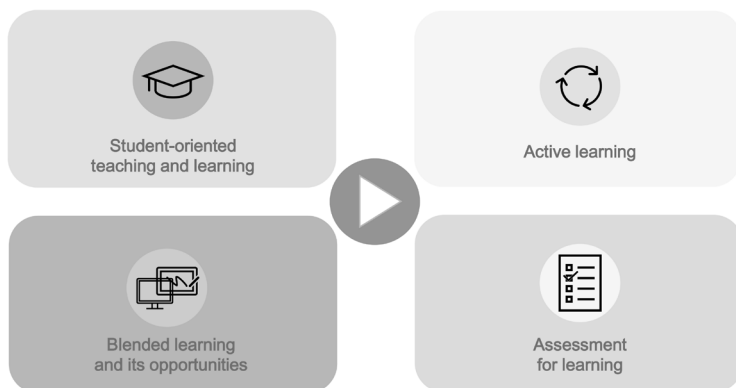


Figure 11.5 Examples of activities included in the ABC-LD@4EU+ training on Moodle. Video designed and produced by 4EU+ Alliance presenting the four main guiding principles (axes) of the ABC method, namely: student-oriented approach, active learning, blended learning and assessment. *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

key pedagogical strategies and approaches in a set of new cards, the 4EU+ cards, which more concretely reflect the alliance’s educational vision, with each card defining a strategy or approach on one side and providing examples on the other (Figures 11.6a and 11.6b). Taking

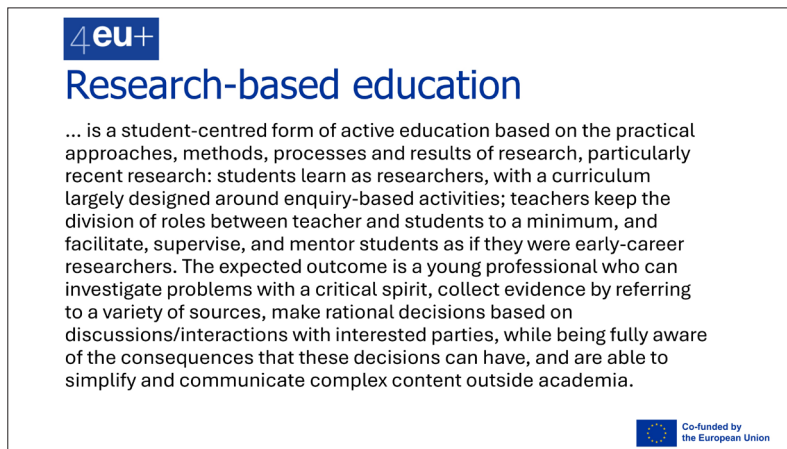


Figure 11.6a Example of the 4EU+ card defining the pedagogical strategy ‘Research-based education’ (front of the card). *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

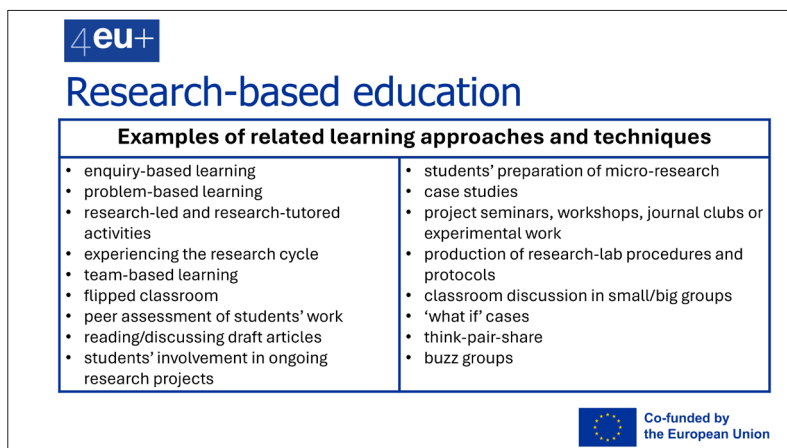


Figure 11.6b Reverse of the 4EU+ card on research-based education, listing various related teaching techniques. *Source:* © 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

advantage of the digital version of these cards, we created a more enlarged ecosystem of resources on content-sharing platform H5P, allowing participants not only to access examples of related learning approaches and techniques but also to discover new ones of which they were previously unaware.

During the workshop, participants begin by selecting one or two 4EU+ cards, which can be used in one of two ways:

- It can serve as an additional seventh or eighth card, to complement the six ABC learning types (acquisition, investigation, collaboration, discussion, practice and production) and can be included on the storyboard. This means that the team uses seven or eight cards for designing their teaching.
- The selected 4EU+ card(s) can also be used as an overarching ‘umbrella’ card, guiding the overall approach to be taken while designing. Starting the design process, by selecting a 4EU+ card, ensures that activities, courses and programmes are closely aligned with the 4EU+ educational strategy, thereby fully supporting the alliance’s shared vision and goals.

Addressing the cultural and linguistic diversity within the alliance was another significant challenge. While our approach supports a shared educational vision, it was crucial to account for the diverse cultural contexts and language needs of participants, when designing the ABC-LD@4EU+ training package. To meet these needs, English was selected as the primary language for the joint workshops and courses, providing a common platform for collaboration. However, recognising the importance of inclusivity and accessibility, local translations are also available. In addition, specialised facilitators and pedagogy experts support the workshops, to ensure that they are effective and meaningful for participants from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The ABC-LD training is delivered in blended format (Figure 11.7) combining synchronous and asynchronous learning activities across four main interconnected phases:

- It begins with an introductory synchronous meeting, to familiarise participants with the ABC-LD framework and methodology. Following this session, participants independently explore the educational aspects of ABC-LD in more depth. These include the six learning types, the glossary, the terminology and the six

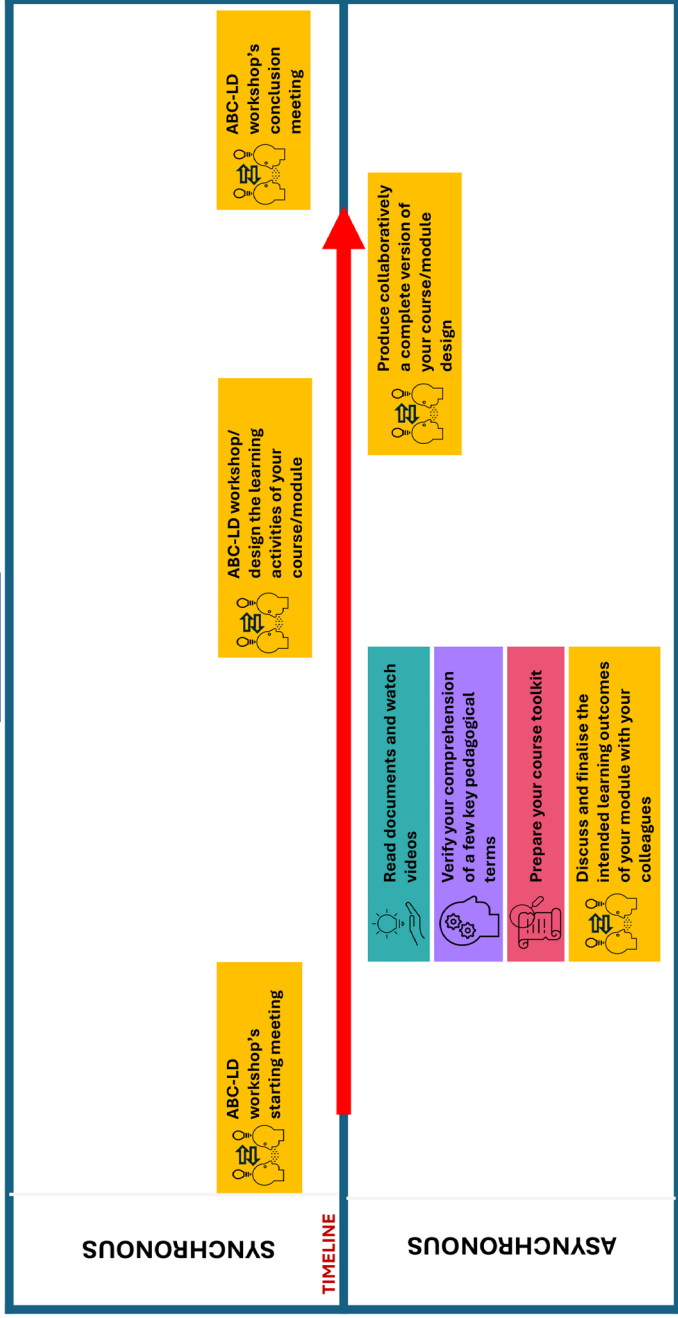


Figure 11.7 A representation of the pedagogical design of the ABC-LD@4EU+ training on a storyboard. *Source:* A derivative of the ‘Activity Based Curriculum Design (ABCD)’ by Vassiliki Michou and Berni Hasenknopf of Sorbonne University (2017). Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

4EU+ cards (first phase), ensuring a thorough understanding of the framework.

- Participants then prepare for the practical application phase, by submitting the course or programme's description, as well as the intended learning outcomes of their teaching (second phase). This asynchronous task serves as the groundwork for the subsequent collaborative design session.
- In the next (third) phase, participants join the synchronous workshop to work collaboratively and design their storyboard visually, integrating the ABC learning types and the 4EU+ cards where appropriate. Following the workshop, the teams continue to work together to refine and finalise, if necessary, the storyboard asynchronously. They also select digital tools to enhance their course or programme.
- The training concludes with a final synchronous session (fourth phase) where groups share their reflections and discuss their work. This final phase provides an opportunity also to ensure alignment with the 4EU+ educational strategy.

Throughout the process, the facilitators are available to answer questions and provide participants with valuable tips and guidance.

Integrating technology for international collaboration

When transitioning the ABC Learning Design training, from a face-to-face format to a fully online environment, the key challenge was maintaining the interactivity and flexibility that defined the original workshop. The objective was to ensure participants had access to all necessary information in advance, promote dynamic interaction among trainees and replicate the physical workshop experience using digital tools, like storyboards, cards and sticky notes. Additionally, it was crucial that the online format offered flexibility with minimal constraints, to accommodate different teaching methods and approaches to learning.

To meet these objectives, a combination of three digital tools was selected: a digital platform based on Moodle, the online collaboration workspace Draft.io and Zoom for video conferencing. Each tool played a specific role in creating a seamless online training environment that mirrored the hands-on nature of the traditional workshop. Selecting the right tools and optimising their use was a gradual process, refined through beta testing and participant feedback.

The decision to use a Moodle-based learning management system (LMS) as the central platform for the training was driven by the widespread adoption of Moodle across the 4EU+ Alliance. As many of the alliance's universities already use Moodle, it provided a logical, consistent base for the training. The LMS served as a repository for resources and a hub for all asynchronous activities, ensuring that participants could easily access materials, review key concepts and prepare for the practical sessions. The flexibility of Moodle also enabled the training courses to be copied and transferred between different universities' platforms. Initially, the course was created and delivered on the University of Warsaw's Moodle platform. As the training evolved, an updated version was developed on Sorbonne University's Moodle, to better meet future needs.

Draft.io was chosen to simulate the physical workspace typically used in face-to-face sessions. This tool allows multiple users to collaborate simultaneously on a shared digital canvas, where they can add, remove and modify content in real time. For the ABC-LD training, Draft.io enabled trainers to preload templates (Figure 11.8) that participants could work on during the workshop, such as cards, timelines, definitions and storyboards. This digital workspace allowed participants to engage interactively with the ABC-LD activity cards and integrate the 4EU+ key strategy cards into their course designs, creating an experience that closely resembled working with physical materials in a classroom setting (Figure 11.9).

For verbal communication and real-time interaction, we selected Zoom as the most convenient tool for the participants but it could easily be replaced with other video conference tools.

Together, these tools facilitated a smooth transition to online learning, ensuring that the ABC-LD training remained interactive, collaborative and in line with the 4EU+ Alliance's educational strategy. By leveraging Moodle for asynchronous preparation, Draft.io for synchronous teamwork and Zoom for verbal communication, the training successfully replicated the essential elements of the face-to-face workshop, providing participants with a flexible yet comprehensive online learning experience.

Case studies: implementing the ABC-LD@4EU+ training at Charles University

In the early years of our collaboration within the 4EU+ Alliance, we discovered significant differences in how teaching is organised across

ABC-LD @ 4EU+

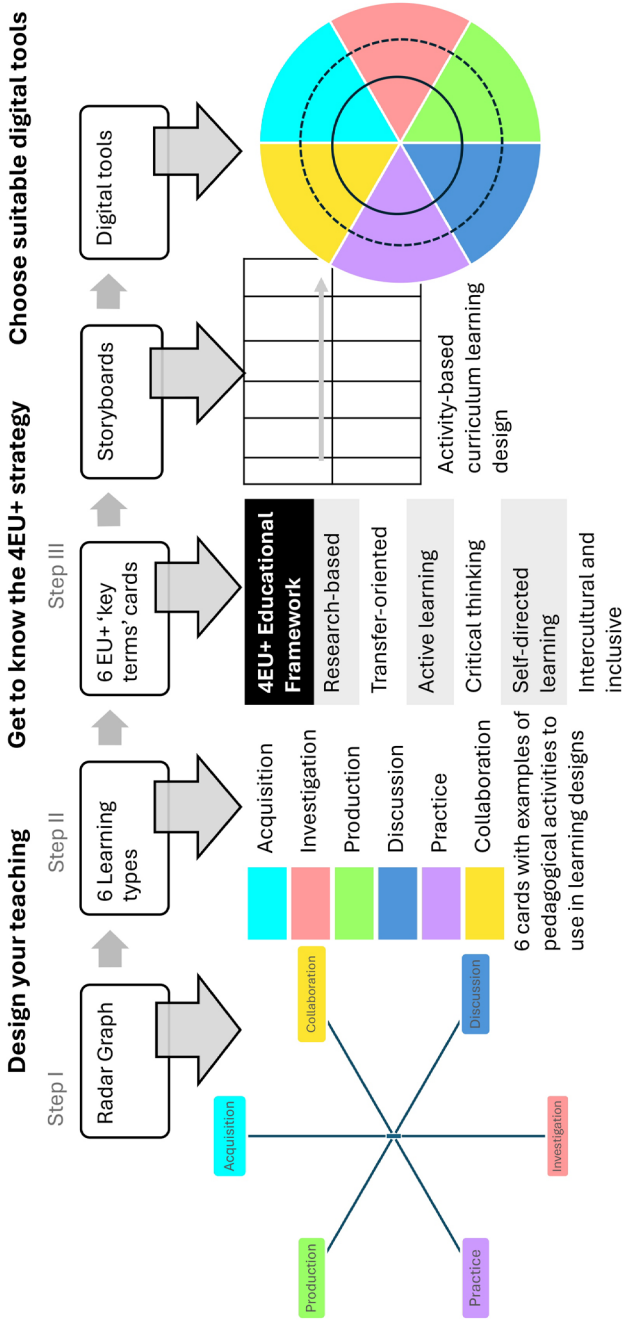


Figure 11.8 A graphical representation of ABC-LD@4EU+ workshop's layout on Draft.io. *Source:* A derivative of 4EU+ Education Framework examples of good practices in teaching and learning by the 4EU+ Alliance (2020). Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Original resources available at <https://4euplus.eu/>.

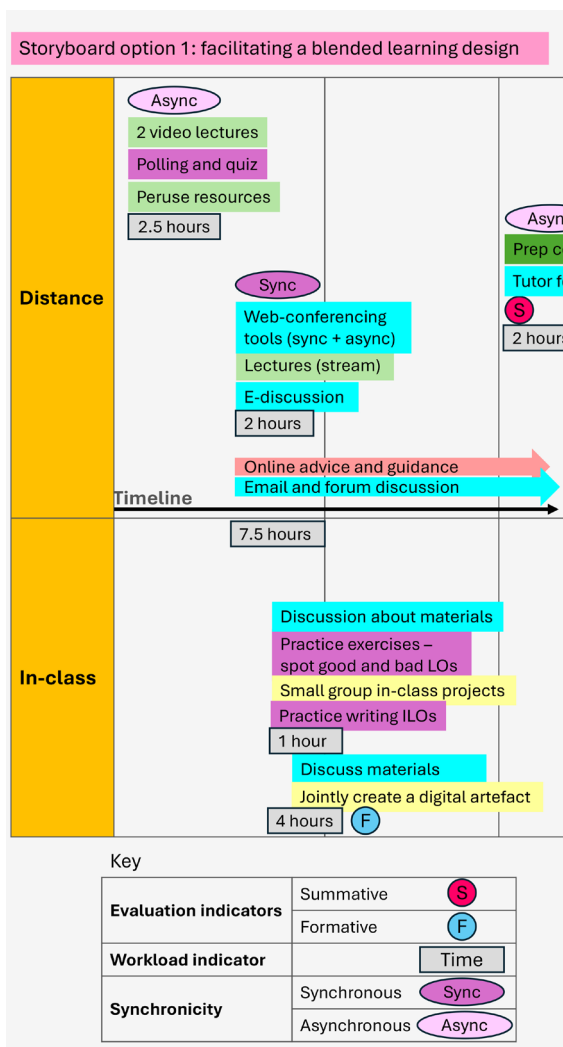


Figure 11.9 Representation of a section of a course designed collaboratively on Draft.io. *Source:* A derivative of the ‘Activity Based Curriculum Design (ABCD)’ by Vassiliki Michou and Berni Hasenknopf of Sorbonne University (2017). Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

the member universities. While we all shared a common language in research, teaching structures appeared more deeply rooted in each country’s unique history and academic traditions. This was particularly evident in a rather conservative approach to pedagogy, even though faculty members were quick to adopt the latest innovations in their research fields.

One of the first challenges we faced was the need to establish a common framework for course design, including a focus on the formulation of clear learning outcomes. At Charles University, learning outcomes were not consistently integrated into most course syllabi. Only those with prior international experience, or a deep interest in pedagogy, were familiar with this concept. However, well-defined and transparent learning outcomes are essential, especially for international courses. They help prospective students understand how a course can enhance their competencies and provide a measurable list of skills, such as: ‘After completing this class, students will be able to ...’.

As our joint course design efforts gained momentum, it became clear that easily accessible learning design was necessary for a wide range of faculty members. The ABC-LD@4EU+ course, initially conducted in English, was soon adapted and localised to meet the needs of teachers across participating universities. Translations of the ABC-LD toolkits, in Czech, Danish, French, German and Italian, being available, broadened the reach of the training. For instance, at Charles University, the ABC-LD has gained popularity, with teachers regularly participating in elective workshops organised by the Centre for Lifelong Learning. These courses prepare educators for international collaboration and ensure their courses meet the standards for sharing across the 4EU+ Alliance.

The expansion of ABC-LD at Charles University has also created synergies with the pedagogical competence centres across its faculties. As designing or revising courses becomes an essential skill, we anticipate growing interest in ABC-LD workshops. This method remains the best-documented approach, with credible, freely available materials and positive experiences shared within the 4EU+ Alliance. Learning design has been highlighted as a key component of the new Framework for Effective Teaching at Charles University.

Trialling the ABC-LD@4EU+ training within the Alliance

After analysing, designing and implementing the first version of the ABC-LD training, we conducted a beta test, with eleven volunteer teachers from all partner universities. This pilot phase allowed us to evaluate the training and make improvements at the outset of the ABC-LD@4EU+ procedure.

Participants provided feedback in a meeting and answered an evaluation questionnaire. They identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT analysis), on the effectiveness of the intensive training. As key strengths, participants were

surprised and pleased by the training, appreciating the guidance and expertise of the facilitators. They found the use of Draft.io to be intuitive. As for weaknesses, they would have liked downloadable versions of the course materials and estimated they needed more time (8–10 hours instead of 6–8) for the training. They would also have appreciated a more straightforward navigation throughout the course and asked for examples of well-designed and poorly designed storyboards. Opportunities for improvement included adding research references, quizzes and separating supplementary content. Threats involved participants struggling with unclear learning outcomes and virtual platform use.

For the facilitators and education experts, managing participants from various universities posed challenges, such as granting platform access, ensuring GDPR compliance⁴ and providing technical support. Despite these hurdles, the iterative process allowed the ABC-LD training to continually evolve, making it more efficient and aligned with the 4EU+ Alliance's educational strategy.

Following the evaluation phase, we launched several training sessions for academic staff and teams interested in designing new modules or programmes, or revising and redesigning existing ones. These training sessions have attracted teachers eager to implement innovative pedagogical practices in their course structures.

The ABC-LD workshop was initially designed for physical face-to-face meetings. However, due to the international character of our alliance, we created a fully online version, keeping its contemporary structure and practices. We also had opportunities to run the ABC-LD training in a blended format.

Both versions share the same content, ideas and strategy, but the comparison revealed key differences. The online course requires prior training in collaborative tools and maintaining engagement is more challenging. Facilitators must manage isolated virtual groups, unlike the face-to-face format, where group discussions are more spontaneous. The online format, however, eliminates travel costs and allows easier sharing of materials.

The ABC-LD training is now an integral part of the official academic development programme within 4EU+. With the establishment of the 4EU+ Centre for Innovative and Digital Teaching and Learning, this training is set to expand further, directly aligned with the educational strategy of the 4EU+ Alliance and reinforcing the core values it promotes.

ABC-LD@4EU+ for an Erasmus+ project at Sorbonne University

The Proteins for Healthy and Sustainable Food (ProFood) project, coordinated by Sorbonne University and funded by Erasmus+, is a collaborative effort with the University of Milan, Copenhagen University and AgroParisTech. The project's primary aim is to address the global challenge of food sustainability, focusing on the potential of plant-based proteins as an alternative to meat production. Through the development of training modules in protein chemistry and biochemistry, ProFood equips master's students with both theoretical knowledge and practical expertise, enabling them to contribute to the food transition movement.

At the core of ProFood are two key initiatives. The first is the creation of an open online learning resource dedicated to plant-based proteins, accessible to master's students. The second is the organisation of two summer schools that bring together students, academics, researchers and stakeholders from the food industry in France, Denmark and Italy. These activities aim to embed, in curricula, knowledge about protein chemistry, while fostering an international network for collaboration in food sustainability education and research. Additionally, ProFood seeks to harmonise pedagogical and digital learning practices across institutions, enhancing the attractiveness of master's programmes to students and organisations across Europe.

A key element in achieving these goals was the ABC-LD@4EU+ training, conducted at the beginning of the project. The training was proposed in a blended format, as there were online meetings and face-to-face activities. Held in person and attended by approximately twelve participants, representing the partner universities, the workshop was designed using the flexible educational framework that integrated the 4EU+ cards. The cards helped guide course design by aligning the pedagogical strategies with the project's objectives and taking into consideration the 'transversal skills'⁵ that are promoted. Each group selected a 4EU+ card that matched their approach, integrating suggested techniques into an ABC-LD storyboard. This process facilitated the creation of course modules that could flexibly combine online and in-person activities, addressing the challenges of international collaboration within 4EU+ universities. The inclusion of digital tools and online resources was essential, allowing for sustained collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The workshop was met with positive feedback from participants, who valued the in-person collaboration. While the initial focus was on designing online educational resources, participants also began

considering their integration into master's degree curricula. This reflective process highlighted the importance of long-term planning and innovation in educational design, with the workshop an instrumental step in creating an international and multidisciplinary approach to teaching.

Conclusion

The ABC-LD@4EU+ training initiative has delivered a tangible, impactful contribution to the academic community of the 4EU+ Alliance. Aligned with the 4EU+ 2025–35 strategy, it strengthens support for educators by fostering collaborative design of educational activities and empowering them to develop and implement innovative pedagogical approaches.

Through a collaborative effort across eight universities, the alliance has successfully adapted and enriched the original ABC framework to meet the specific pedagogical needs of a diverse, multicultural academic environment. Key achievements include the development of digitised resources, the creation of a comprehensive pretraining phase and the integration of innovative tools, such as Draft.io, for interactive, online course design. The introduction of new ABC-LD@4EU+ cards aligned with the alliance's educational strategy, as well as practical guides and storyboards, provide educators with practical tools to improve curriculum design (Michou et al. 2025).

By making these resources widely available (at Michou et al. 2025) across participating institutions, ABC-LD@4EU+ offers an accessible, replicable model for academic development. The training package empowers educators to design flexible, student-centred courses that cater to both in-person and online formats, thereby supporting the alliance's broader goals of fostering pedagogical innovation and international collaboration. These efforts not only enhance teaching practices but also provide a sustainable framework for the future of higher education across Europe.

Notes

- 1 For examples of supplementary materials see Michou et al. 2025.
- 2 Further illustrations of elements of the 4EU+ adaptation discussed in this chapter are available at Michou et al. 2025.
- 3 See 4EU+ glossary in Michou et al 2025.
- 4 General Data Protection Regulation, a European Union law for online data protection.
- 5 For information about transversal skills see <https://www.transvalproject.eu/>.

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Conclusion

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

When ABC Learning Design (ABC) was created, initially to address a local curriculum design need in 2014, its founders Clive Young and Nataša Perović had little idea of how the method would grow and evolve over the subsequent decade. Its success in addressing a sector-wide need was not by chance, however, but derived from a pragmatic understanding of the needs of mainstream academic teachers. Between them, Clive and Nataša had decades of experience in both teaching and teacher support roles, in a wide variety of tertiary education institutions. They recognised that most educators wished to improve their students' learning but were constrained by time, opportunity and the pedagogical language necessary to articulate and discuss ideas with colleagues.

In simple terms then, ABC offers a dedicated and neutral environment to enable pedagogical discussion. One of the most gratifying aspects of facilitating ABC workshops, particularly in the classic in-room format, is witnessing the rapid upsurge of this discourse among participants. It often feels like uncorking a bottle of fizz. Inspiring ideas emerge so rapidly that they are hard to process in real time, even by the assembled group. Multiple teaching innovations are typically expressed, shared, evaluated and endorsed in the intense session. Many educators find this collective valuation, of new and existing strategies, empowering. As noted in [Chapter 1](#), the participant survey conducted during ABC's European project indicated that many teachers felt more confident in their work after attending an ABC workshop.

Although the underlying concept of ABC therefore seems simple, to work effectively as a technique several different operational and

conceptual elements are required to connect and complement each other. Compiling this book provided both the UCL team and the book contributors a valuable opportunity to reflect upon and analyse these components. The aim in this final chapter is to identify the success factors of ABC and, more generally, to suggest that to be effective at scale any curriculum design intervention will have to incorporate at least some of these characteristics. We have identified ten overlapping elements as below.

1. Robust pedagogic framework

The ABC framework's operationalisation of Laurillard's six clear learning types (acquisition, collaboration, discussion, investigation, practice and production) makes it easy for educators to understand and apply well-respected pedagogical principles without prior training in educational theory. Educators at all levels can typically identify the learning types inherent in their current teaching methods, and the group analysis of the mapping itself often prompts valuable pedagogical reflection. [Chapters 9](#) and [11](#) illustrate how ABC can be usefully deployed alongside other design frameworks, in addition to its value as an independent methodology. [Chapter 9](#) also explores how a deep dive into the theory and process behind ABC can support the thinking of education professionals, showing this level of pedagogical unpacking is possible, though not necessary to run the workshops successfully.

2. Simplicity

From an operational standpoint, the 'classic' in-room format of the ABC workshop needs very little resource or preparation by facilitators or participants, beyond booking a room with suitable tables and printing some materials. [Chapter 9](#) exemplifies its implementation in a resource-constrained setting. Likewise, the online variant can be run via well-known digital communication and collaboration tools. [Chapter 8](#) illustrates how collaborative online workplaces facilitate sustained interaction with academic design teams. In both modes the simple, stripped-down structure of the workshop enables a fast, productive initiation but also provides ample conceptual space for discussion, sharing and reflection.

3. Open education ethos

From its inception, ABC has been distributed under an open licence, accompanied by abundant guidance and editable materials to print and adapt. Consequently, institutions can experiment with the method with minimal risk and expand and roll out as necessary. Implementers are encouraged to share ideas, translations and adaptations. This ready availability and culture of exchange has undoubtedly been pivotal in its extensive adoption. The reasoning for ABC's open ethos is explored in the Introduction of this book.

4. Focus on enhancing the student experience

Most institutions and teachers share the stated aim of improving the student experience, so learning enhancement is always a good starting point. Enhancing can be a rather abstract notion, though, hence the implicit ABC emphasis on 'active learning' and 'constructive alignment'. Active learning is a teaching approach that engages students directly in the learning process through meaningful activities and discussions, rather than passively receiving information. The 'learning types' cards (see [Appendix 1](#), Facilitating an ABC workshop) prompt educators to identify the methods they are currently using and consider alternatives for more productive student engagement. Constructive alignment tries to ensure coherence between intended learning outcomes (ILOs), teaching activities and assessment methods. The principle is explained further in [Chapter 3](#) and ABC addresses each element in different ways. Some facilitators, for example, extend the workshop to focus specifically on ILOs or assessment. At UCL a separate workshop (see [Chapter 2](#)) is now sometimes employed if these elements necessitate specific development.

5. Localisation, versatility and scalability

There are many instances, throughout the book, of how the framework can be adapted and localised to suit diverse cultural, institutional and technological contexts. [Chapter 5](#) suggests considerations when localising, and particular attention is directed to [Chapter 3](#), where ABC has become integrated into an institutional initiative to facilitate blended learning modes. [Chapter 3](#) may be regarded as a rather

top-down strategic approach, but ABC, of course, can be utilised equally effectively by individual educators or support staff, working on just a single course or module. It does not necessarily rely on large, specialist support. As facilitators quickly gain experience in the technique through practice, we have observed a cascading effect, wherein faculty who have engaged in sessions subsequently run workshops autonomously for their departments. Once institutions are familiar with the tools, they can then be scaled up through, for example, whole-programme (re)design and review extending to implementation of institutional and strategic aims.

6. Emphasis on collaboration

The principles of dialogue and collaboration are an integral part of the methodology, not only within the workshop activities but across the community. As exemplified in [Chapter 9](#), by bringing together multiple stakeholders of researchers, practitioners and communities, the ABC framework fosters a shared understanding of learning designs. The framework can also provide a robust, cross-institutional, shared design language, the prime example being the transnational 4EU+ European University Alliance, as featured in [Chapter 11](#).

7. Alignment with other educational strategies, tools and processes

As mentioned in [Chapter 2](#), one of the early drivers of ABC in its home institution was to facilitate the uptake of another educational initiative, the Connected Curriculum. In this book we observe ABC being used to support the roll-out of a range of institutional strategies, by mapping learning activities to the relevant framework. In [Chapter 4](#) the alignment is with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Here, reflective prompts embedded in ABC workshops have encouraged educators to design accessible and inclusive curricula. ABC has also been used to support wider institutional strategies, such as, in [Chapter 3](#), VIVES's own version of the 'connected curriculum'. [Chapter 6](#) demonstrates how ABC is deployed alongside a complementary UCL tool, the Learning Designer, to facilitate the development of online courses. [Chapter 2](#) describes how in its home institution, ABC has now been aligned to formal quality processes.

8. Encouragement of critical reflection and continuous improvement

Reflection on the learning designs, from the perspective of the student experience, is a key aspect of the framework. [Chapter 4](#) describes in detail the rationale behind critical reflection and how this valuable process is encouraged in localised versions of the workshop. Teams can use the ABC storyboards to return to designs during or after the delivery of the curriculum to check if intended outcomes have been met. [Chapter 5](#) explores how this idea can encourage longitudinal evaluation of the learning outcomes, both for students and ABC participants, and the types of metrics that may be considered to assess the impact.

9. Professional development

Although not initially envisaged as a staff development activity, embedding ABC in faculty development programmes can help educators acquire new skills, to navigate the complex challenges of blended and online learning. Many of the chapters in the book cover this important aspect, including [chapters 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9](#). [Chapter 8](#) describes ABC's integration within a credit-bearing teacher training programme, [Chapter 10](#) shows it working in professional development for schoolteachers and in [Chapter 11](#) it is part of a transnational training programme for university-based educators.

10. Integration with digital tools

One of the major innovations of ABC, necessitated by the pandemic, was the development of digital versions of the workshop and associated tools. Transitioning the framework to digital platforms allows for real-time collaboration, scalability and enhanced efficiency. This shift also addresses practical challenges, such as version control and remote collaboration, making the framework more appealing in digitally advanced contexts. [Chapters 6, 7 and 11](#) provide excellent examples of collaborative digital processes incorporating ABC. Furthermore, [Chapter 10](#) suggests supplementary visualisation tools that may be developed using ABC as a base.

To sum up, beyond its proven usefulness as a learning design method, the international roll-out of ABC may be considered as a case study in the complexities of educational transformation at local and institutional levels. Its evolution from a local curriculum tool to an internationally used learning design framework highlights both the opportunities and challenges inherent in implementing pedagogical innovation at scale. We believe the ABC story, over the last decade, underscores the universal importance of simplicity, adaptability, collaboration and alignment with existing educational strategies. As all our institutions continue to adapt to the fast-changing environment of education, to some extent ABC may offer a practical blueprint for balancing strategic goals with the realities of academic practice, ensuring that innovation can be not only introduced but, in the long term, embedded and embraced.

Appendix 1

Facilitating an ABC workshop

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

This Appendix explains how the ‘classic’ (that is, UCL) version of an ABC-LD workshop is structured for the original in-class format. It includes detailed step-by-step advice on how to run the 90-minute workshop in this variant, why the event is structured this way and potential questions the organisers (and participants) might have. The workshop is always organised in a very planned and time-conscious manner. Most of the 90 minutes is spent on group activity, but it starts with a brief presentation, introducing the toolkit elements and their pedagogical background. All materials to support this are available as part of the transnational Erasmus+ ABC to VLE project (2020) toolkit, produced with detailed guides for localising and cascading the ABC method within local networks (Perović and Young 2020). Some 20 translations of the ABC workshop materials are now available as part of the toolkit, crowdsourced by the wider ABC practitioner community. The various localisations (see [Chapter 1](#)) are all derived from UCL’s ‘classic’ campus-based approach, which is described in this [Appendix](#).

At UCL, ABC is usually run as a ‘pop-up’ workshop, preferably held in the target department. Participants are invited by the module or programme academic lead, with organisation by the local administrative team. This lifts the organisational and administrative burden from the central team, helps ensure a large turnout and gives the impression of a ‘business as usual’ activity (rather than a centrally initiated staff development exercise). One consequence is that the UCL ABC team often do not know who will arrive on the day, so as a rule, do not set any pre-workshop homework. At UCL the ABC team are positioned as external consultants, with the purpose to help the programme team work through a task or challenge identified by them. It is important to confirm the agency of the teachers in this process. The aim of the ABC workshop is

to facilitate internal discussion, not to audit a course or provide specific direction (unless agreed beforehand).

Module workshops are planned for 90 minutes, and several modules can be designed in parallel. We now try to run ABCs for whole programmes, with the core and main optional module teams invited to work together. In this case, the workshop is extended to 120 minutes, to provide the programme leader with time to guide the whole programme team on challenges they should tackle together. These may include a focus, for example, on the institution's educational strategy, diversity of assessment, issues raised by students, changes in professional accreditation and so on.

The ABC facilitators arrive early to set up the tables with the blank storyboard sheets, the worksheets and the preprinted card sets (Figure A1.1).

Each table represents a course, module or thematic team. The toolkit elements are carefully laid out on each table. The programme or module lead will usually allocate tables to module teams (module teams are groups of people facilitating learning on a module – lecturers and teachers). About four participants at a table is ideal – larger groups risk people disassociating from the conversation. Individuals can work alone but this fails to take advantage of the benefits of exchanging ideas in conversation, so facilitators often pair participants, or ask a supporting



Figure A1.1 Classic ABC workshop set-up. *Source:* © Editors.

role attendee to join a lone participant. Students who have completed the course are sometimes invited to join the table to share their experience (Perović and Young 2020). The ABC workshop follows a highly structured and time-conscious format. Most of the workshop is devoted to group activity, but it begins with a brief presentation introducing the ABC elements and process. As emphasised above, ABC facilitators are mostly present in a supporting role, to ensure the workshop runs to time and to clarify any aspects of the content or format. As experts, they can also provide at-table advice, but it is better, for the ‘flow’, to let module teams work out solutions for themselves and to intervene only intermittently.

The first task for the teams (re)designing either a module or a programme is to agree on a tweet-size description of the module (strapline, unique selling point (USP), value proposition and so on) and write it on the worksheet provided (Figure A1.2 and Figure A1.3).

Team leaders report this back to the room. The purpose of this step is to agree on the overall aim of the module or programme under discussion. Participants then sketch the rough shape (Figure A1.4) of their module or programme, as they envision it or as it runs currently, as represented by learning types on a spider graph (for instance, how much

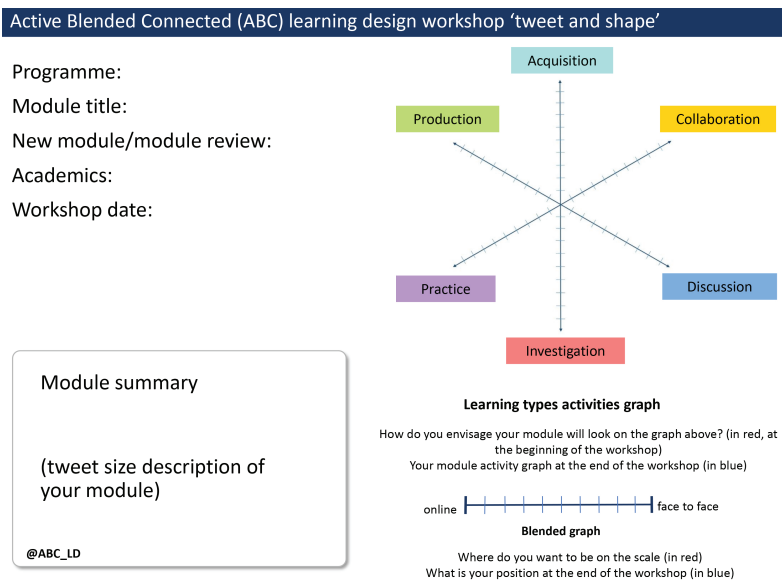


Figure A1.2 The first three workshop activities (tweet, shape, blend).

Source: © CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

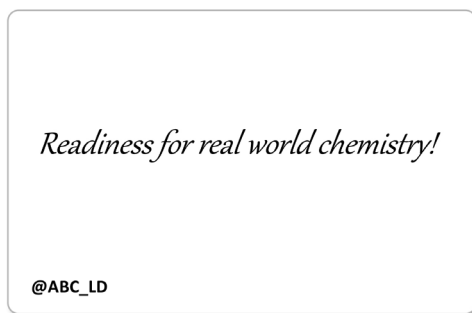


Figure A1.3 Tweet-size description of the module. *Source:* © Editors.

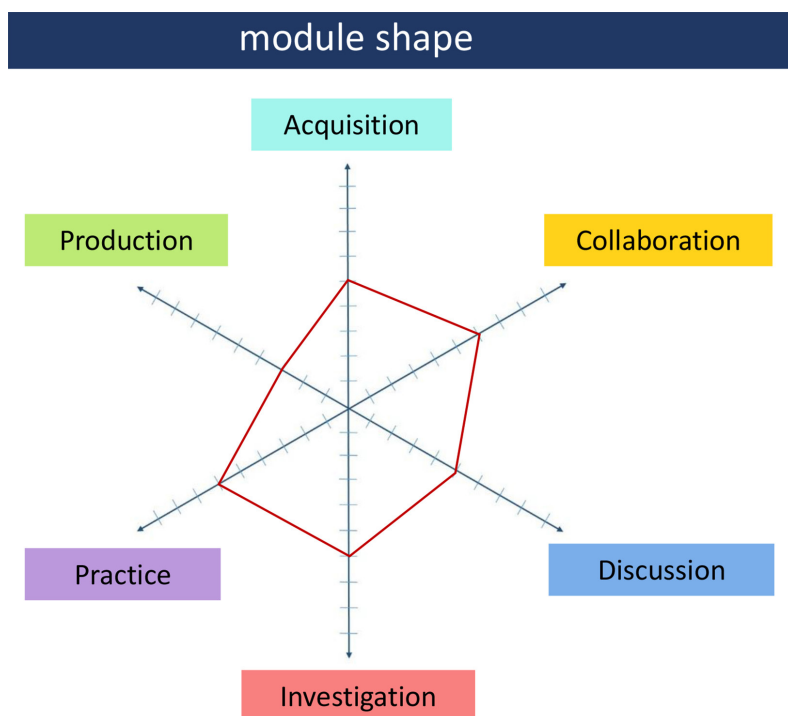


Figure A1.4 Shape of the module drawn using a red pen. *Source:* © Editors.

practice, collaboration and so on) and the envisaged blend of face-to-face and online learning.

Next, the teams plan the distribution of learning types cards.

Original UCL ABC learning types cards are shown front and back below (Figure A1.5 to Figure A1.10). The text on the cards is also shown in Table A1.3.

Acquisition

Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos

Acquisition	
Conventional method	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> reading books, papers	<input type="checkbox"/> reading multimedia, websites, digital documents and resources
<input type="checkbox"/> listening to teacher presentations face-to-face, lectures	<input type="checkbox"/> listening to podcasts, webcasts
<input type="checkbox"/> watching demonstrations, master classes	<input type="checkbox"/> watching animations, videos
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.5 Acquisition card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

The postcard-sized learning types cards are sequenced and combined along the timeline of the module or programme, represented by a large A1-size paper storyboard. Often, learning types sequences are repeated, and the module or programme is usually represented by two or three patterns of learning activities (Figure A1.11).

Collaboration

Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself

Collaboration	
Conventional method	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> small group project	<input type="checkbox"/> small group projects using online forums, wikis, chat rooms, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> discussing others' outputs	<input type="checkbox"/> discussing others' outputs
<input type="checkbox"/> building joint output	<input type="checkbox"/> building a joint digital output
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.6 Collaboration card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* © ABC Learning Design - CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

With this outline agreed by the group, participating teams turn over the cards. On the reverse of each card is a list of online and conventional learning activities related to each learning type, and the team can select from these suggestions or write in their own ideas. The aim is not to advocate any 'ideal' mix, but to enable a structured pedagogical dialogue

Discussion

Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers

Discussion	
Conventional method	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> tutorials	<input type="checkbox"/> online tutorials
<input type="checkbox"/> seminars	<input type="checkbox"/> seminars
<input type="checkbox"/> discussion groups	<input type="checkbox"/> email discussions
<input type="checkbox"/> class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/> discussion groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> discussion forums
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> web-conferencing tools
<input type="checkbox"/>	synchronous and asynchronous
	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.7 Discussion card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* © ABC Learning Design - CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

among the team (Figure A1.12). At this stage, the teams also stick the cards to the storyboard A1 sheet.

Teams then identify the learning activities to be assessed, and affix silver (formative) and gold (summative) adhesive stars to those activities. At this stage, module teams can return to their learning types distribution graphs, from the beginning of the workshop, and redraw the shape of the graph to match what they actually designed, using a blue

Investigation

Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught

Investigation	
Conventional method	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> using text-based study guides	<input type="checkbox"/> using online advice and guidance
<input type="checkbox"/> analysing the ideas and information in a range of materials and resources	<input type="checkbox"/> analysing the ideas and information in a range of digital resources
<input type="checkbox"/> using conventional methods to collect and analyse data	<input type="checkbox"/> using digital tools to collect and analyse data
<input type="checkbox"/> comparing texts	<input type="checkbox"/> comparing digital texts
<input type="checkbox"/> searching and evaluating information and ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> using digital tools for searching and evaluating information and ideas
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.8 Investigation card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* © ABC Learning Design - CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

pen, discussing any changes they make (particularly, the differences to the shape made with the red pen) (Figure A1.13).

With the design now complete (Figure A1.14), participants can look at components of the module in more detail.

Bespoke stickers may be added, to highlight activities aligned with institutional frameworks, such as employability, graduate outcomes,

Practice

Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal, and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal

Practice	
Conventional method	Digital technology
<input type="checkbox"/> practising exercises	<input type="checkbox"/> using models
<input type="checkbox"/> doing practice-based projects	<input type="checkbox"/> simulations
<input type="checkbox"/> labs	<input type="checkbox"/> microworlds
<input type="checkbox"/> field trips	<input type="checkbox"/> virtual labs and field trips
<input type="checkbox"/> face-to-face role-play activities	<input type="checkbox"/> online role play activities
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.9 Practice card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* © ABC Learning Design - CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

universal design for learning/accessibility (for example, Tobin and Behling 2018), digital capabilities, data points for data analytics or to identify other areas where teams may need additional support (Figure A1.15). This has proved an effective and natural way to work with what can otherwise be challenging issues.

Production

Learning through production is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice

Production	
Conventional method	Digital technology
producing articulations using:	
<input type="checkbox"/> statements	<input type="checkbox"/> producing and storing digital documents representations of designs
<input type="checkbox"/> essays	<input type="checkbox"/> performances, artefacts
<input type="checkbox"/> reports	<input type="checkbox"/> animations
<input type="checkbox"/> accounts	<input type="checkbox"/> models
<input type="checkbox"/> designs	<input type="checkbox"/> resources
<input type="checkbox"/> performances	<input type="checkbox"/> slideshows
<input type="checkbox"/> artefacts	<input type="checkbox"/> photos
<input type="checkbox"/> animations	<input type="checkbox"/> videos
<input type="checkbox"/> models	<input type="checkbox"/> blogs
<input type="checkbox"/> videos	<input type="checkbox"/> e-portfolios.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.10 Production card. Front and back of original UCL ABC learning type card. *Source:* © ABC Learning Design - CC BY NC SA. ABC Learning Design method by Clive Young and Nataša Perović, UCL (2015). Learning types, Laurillard, D. (2012). Resources available from <https://abc-ld.org>.

Teams are strongly encouraged to write an action plan (Figure A1.16) to decide who will do what. The action plan may call for extra input from the wider support team, the gathering of additional resources, the identification of copyright issues and so on.

After photographing the designs, each module lead explains their designs briefly to the rest of the room, providing opportunities to

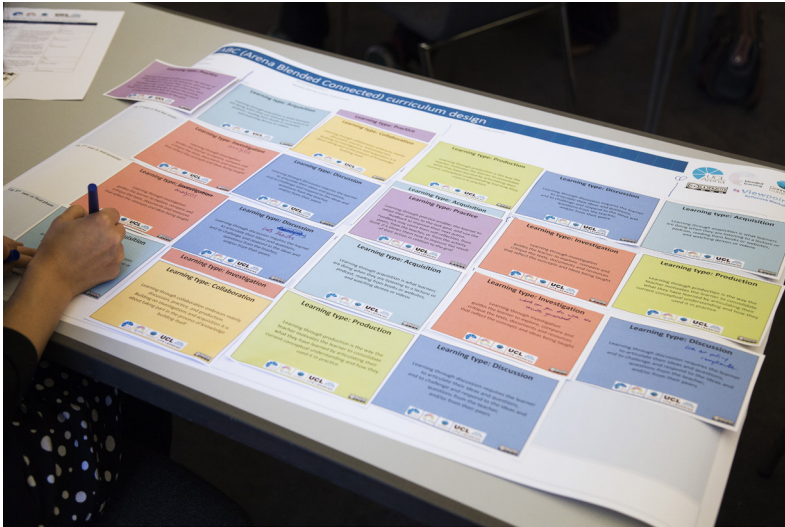


Figure A1.11 Learning activities sequenced and combined using the cards. *Source:* © Alejandro Salinas Lopez and UCL Educational Media, 2019.



Figure A1.12 Selecting and adding learning activities. *Source:* © Alejandro Salinas Lopez and UCL Educational Media, 2019.

explore progression, through-lines of activity and holistic implementation of specific strategies across the programme (module ‘promenade’). This stage greatly enhances the workshop’s value and offers a unique overview of the student experience across the whole programme.

module shape

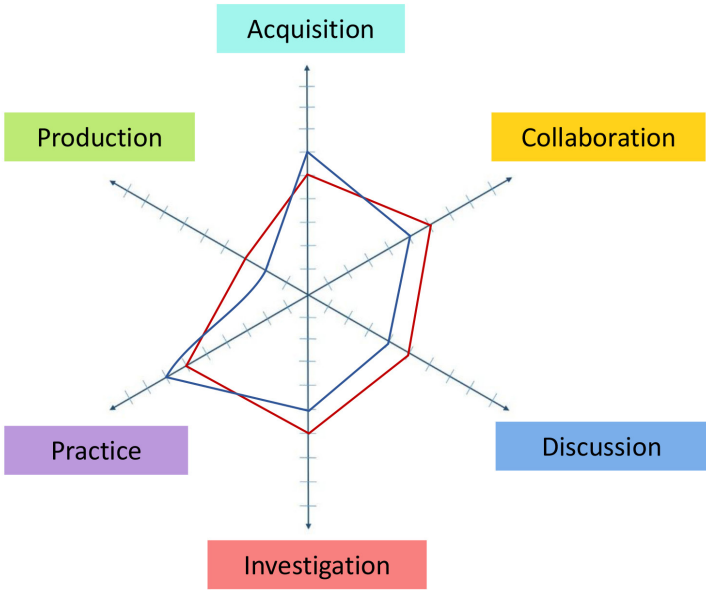


Figure A1.13 Learning types shape redrawn using the blue pen.
Source: © ABC Learning Design.

Although it is feasible, indeed normal, for teams to complete their designs during the workshop, often individuals and groups wish to spend extra time designing or talking with colleagues and ABC facilitators. The storyboard they produced may subsequently be used to develop detailed student documentation, describe student journeys, or outline a module in the virtual learning environment, such as Canvas or Moodle.

Types of ABC-LD workshop

Table A1.1 shows activities and times for facilitation of the ‘classic’ version of the ABC Learning Design workshop, as developed by Nataša Perović and Clive Young at UCL.

The core structure is the same for all workshops, but programme level workshops are 30 minutes longer, as are the ‘train the trainer’ workshops, to allow the time for promenade and questions:

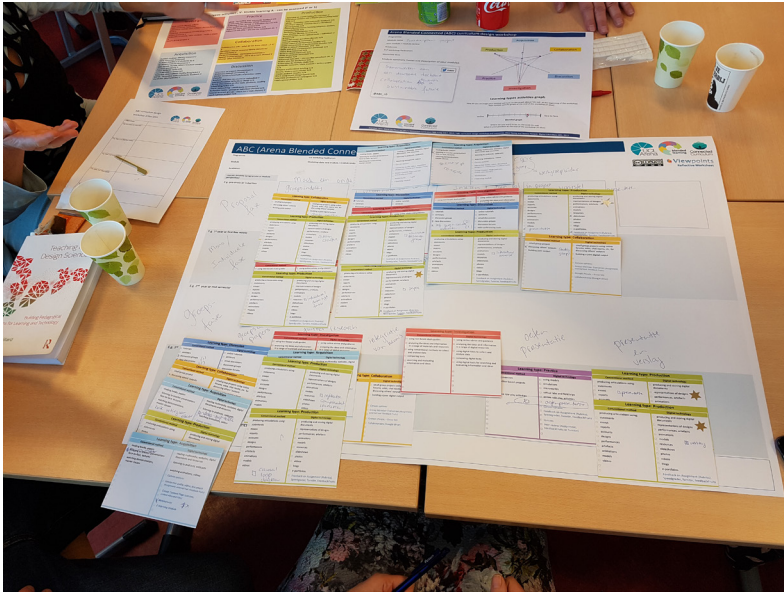


Figure A1.14 Completed module design – a storyboard of students’ learning journey. *Source:* © Editors.



Figure A1.15 Blue stickers indicate learning activities aligned with institutional framework. *Source:* © Editors.

- 1) Module/courses/MOOCs (90 minutes)
 - Each team (re)designs their module or course. The teams don't have to be from the same programme.

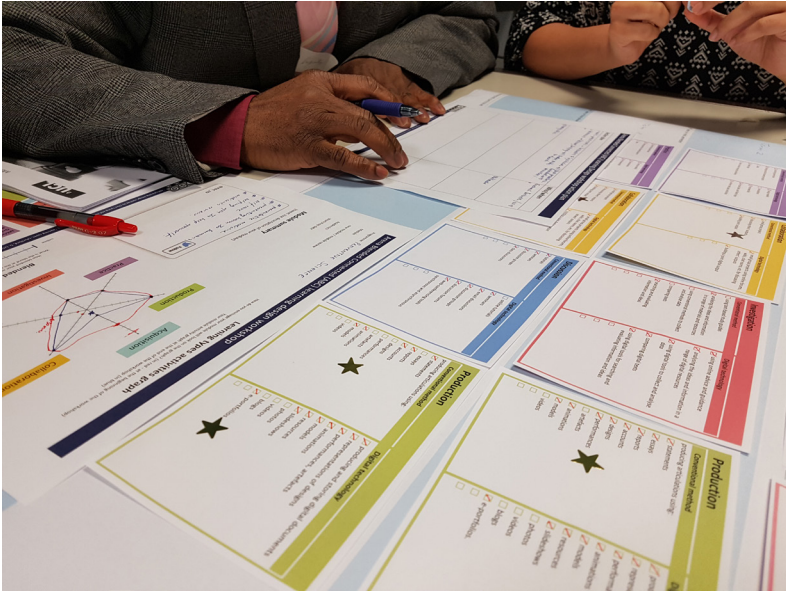


Figure A1.16 Action plan stage of the workshop. *Source:* © Editors.

2) Programme workshop (two hours)

All module teams from a programme participate in the workshop. The programme lead introduces the workshop aims prior to the workshop (for example: alignment with strategic initiatives, response to students' feedback, change in learning outcomes). The introduction by the programme lead should not be longer than 10 minutes.

3) Demo workshops (90 minutes)

The teams get together just for the workshop. Each team works on one team member's course. Usually, this is an academic development session or a conference session.

4) 'Train the trainer' workshop (two hours or more)

Sessions tailored for a particular group/institution and their needs.

Who should attend ABC-LD workshops?

Anyone planning to develop or review their design for learning. Workshop participants can be lecturers, students, researchers and professionals without teaching experience.

The workshop can be facilitated for programmes, modules, short courses and MOOCs.

Table A1.1 ABC workshop schedule

Activity	Instructions	Time in minutes
Session outline, workshop introduction and overview of activities.	A simple description of the 'big picture', the essential elements of the module in terms of learning types, institutional strategy elements and the type of blend expected (face-to-face and online) derived from the programme and module specifications.	20 (facilitators)
Activity 1a	Module details, tweet-size description and sharing with the group.	7
Activity 1b	Module shape – an overview of envisaged activities on learning types graph.	5–7
Activity 1c	Blend graph.	2
Activity 2a	Module teams select learning types cards and arrange them in sequences, on the timeline on the storyboard sheet (storyboard of students' journey).	20
Activity 2b	Cards are turned over and learning activities selected from (or added to) the cards.	15
Activity 2c	Assessment activities are then highlighted and the storyboard is agreed as a representation.	7
Activity 3	The two graphs (learning types and blended) are redrawn, if there were changes.	5
Activity 4	An action plan is agreed.	5

Source: © Authors

Who should be in the learning design team?

Teams seem to work best with 2–4 people per module (course). All of them should be teaching on a module, including the module lead. Exceptions are:

- One person teaching on a module. If there is only one person teaching on a module it is recommended that they invite a colleague to join them as a 'critical friend' team member. If someone has to work on their own, they will still benefit from the workshop, but

would miss out on collaboration and discussion with a colleague, which is one of the valuable aspects of the workshop (as reported by participants).

- Large groups. The module lead should discuss with all of the group how to organise the module, maybe by dividing the work. If all ‘teachers’ are external speakers/experts, it is recommended that the module lead should design the module.
- Demo session team. The demo sessions may consist of teams without a specific module. The group decides on a ‘lead’ (usually a person with a specific idea for a module re/design) and work on the lead’s module.

Optional team members:

- if there is an educational technologist or instructional designer in the faculty, they should also be invited to the workshop
- students (previous or current), academic developers
- programme lead

It is important that the person that identified the need for the workshop (often the programme lead) agrees with module teams on the most important elements that should be demonstrated in the design (an overview of intentions).

At what stage of course/programme development should the workshop be facilitated?

The workshop can be facilitated for modules or programmes at any stage of the course life cycle: pre approval, after the validation, or as a review of an existing module. It is important to discuss the development stage with facilitators prior to the workshop, so that the workshop can be tailored to focus on local needs. For example, strategic dimensions, institutional strategy, change in learning outcomes or requirements from professional bodies, employability and so on.

Who can facilitate an ABC workshop?

The workshop can best be facilitated by a person who attended the ‘train the trainer’ ABC session and has facilitated an ABC workshop, observed by approved ABC facilitators. An ABC session should not be facilitated by fewer than two facilitators (except when the group of participants is very small.).

Can a workshop have any number of participants?

There is no ideal number of participants per workshop. It is important that they can all see and hear the facilitators' presentation and that there is enough space for facilitators to walk around the working teams. If you are facilitating a workshop for more than six teams (tables), it is advisable to invite more than two facilitators, in order to give attention to all participants. This provides better 'at table' support and ensures the smooth progress of the workshop.

Workshop room set-up

- Computer and projector are required for ABC presentation.
- Tables should be arranged for group work (cabaret style). Each surface should be larger than an A1 sheet, in order to fit all workshop resources. There should be enough space for participants to sit comfortably and for facilitators to move around the tables and interact with the participants during the workshop (Figure A1.1).
- The room should be set up before participants' arrival (it usually takes 20–30 minutes to set up the tables for 6–8 teams).

If refreshments for the teams are provided, it is advisable to keep them in a separate area of the workshop room.

Table set-up

The table for each module is set up in exactly the same way.

It is strongly recommended to keep the resources tidy, and to have the same order of cards and other resources on each of the tables. Each set of resources is arranged around the A1 sheet (storyboard sheet). The A1 sheet is usually big enough to represent a canvas for one module or course. In most cases one sheet is big enough for the design of one module or course.

Additional sheets, such as institutional strategies documents, are useful, but try not to overcrowd the table with too many documents, as these can be distracting. The resources for the 'classic' version are as shown below (Figure A1.17). Participants often bring their own laptops, to access module outcomes, validation documents and other resources, so it is useful to provide some extra space on the tables and to choose a room with adequate power supply.



Figure A1.17 ABC workshop resources for one module. *Source:* © Editors.

Printing

Allow plenty of time for printing and putting the workshop resources together. Printing, cutting cards (if you are doing the work yourself) and putting resources together for the workshop takes longer than one might expect (Table A1.2). All printouts are in colour, and assume they are single-use, so that participants can write notes on them and take them away.

Table A1.2 ABC workshop resources checklist

Resources and format/size	Quantity
ABC workshop presentation (PPT)	one per workshop
ABC storyboard worksheet (A1, 594 mm × 841 mm or c. 23½ × 33 inches)	one per module
ABC learning types cards (A6)	six sets of six cards each (36 cards per module)
Tweet and shape worksheet (A4)	one per module
Additional online activities sheet (A4) (optional)	one per module
Action plan (A4)	

Table A1.2 (continued)

Resources and format/size	Quantity
Silver and gold star stickers for assessment	10 silver and 10 gold stars per module (minimum)
Red pen and blue pen	one of each colour per module
Blu Tack or equivalent	6–10 cm ² of Blu Tack per team
Institutional strategy sheet (A4)	one per module
ABC additional online activities (A4) (optional)	one per module

Source: © Authors

Variants of the original ABC cards

Examples of translated and adapted cards (Figure A1.18, Figure A1.19, Figure A1.20, Figure A1.21).

Learning type: Collaboration

<p><i>Networked</i>: interact with networks of peers, ‘like’ comments and ‘follow’ other learners.</p> <p><i>Conversational</i>: converse with others, comments linked with each step.</p> <p><i>Collaborative</i>: construct shared understanding. Discussion step to explore learners’ perspectives and experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> building a joint digital output <input type="checkbox"/> small-group projects using online forums, wikis, chat rooms, etc. for discussing others’ outputs <input type="checkbox"/>
--	---

Description _____

Post-step discussion point _____

Learning time _____

Figure A1.18 Back of UCL ABC collaboration card adapted for MOOCs.

Source: © ABC Learning Design.

Table A1.3 Learning types definitions and activities used for original ABC cards at UCL

Learning type	Definition	Learning activities	
Acquisition	Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites and watching demos or videos.	Conventional	Reading books, papers, listening to teacher presentations face to face, lectures, watching demonstrations, master classes.
		Digital	Reading multimedia, websites, digital documents and resources, listening to podcasts, webcasts, watching animations, videos.
Collaboration	Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice and production. Building on investigations and acquisition, it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself.	Conventional	Small group project, discussing others' outputs, building joint output.
		Digital	Small group project, using online forums, wikis, chat rooms, discussing others' outputs, building a joint digital output.
Discussion	Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers.	Conventional	Tutorials, seminars, discussion groups, class discussions.
		Digital	Online tutorials, seminars, email discussions, discussion groups, discussion forums, web-conferencing tools, synchronous and asynchronous.
Investigation	Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught.	Conventional	Using text-based study guides, analysing the ideas and information in a range of materials and resources, using conventional methods to collect and analyse data, comparing texts, searching and evaluating information and ideas.

Table A1.3 (continued)

Learning type	Definition	Learning activities	
		Digital	Using online advice and guidance, analysing the ideas and information in a range of digital resources, using digital tools to collect and analyse data, comparing digital texts, using digital tools for searching and evaluating information and ideas.
Practice	Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal.	Conventional	Practising exercises, doing practice-based projects, labs, field trips, face to face role-play activities.
		Digital	Using models, simulations, microworlds, virtual labs and field trips, online role-play activities.
Production	Learning through production is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice.	Conventional	Producing articulations using statements, essays, reports, accounts, designs, performances, artefacts, animations, models, videos.
		Digital	Producing and storing digital documents, representations of designs, performances, artefacts, animations, models, resources, slideshows, photos, videos, blogs, e-portfolios.

Source: Definitions from Laurillard 2012, chapters 6–11; learning activities adapted from Laurillard 2012, table 6.3, ‘Types of learning and the different types of conventional and digital learning technologies that serve them’, p. 96.

Suradnja

Učenje kroz suradnju obuhvaća raspravu, praktičan rad i rješavanje/obavljanje postavljenog zadatka.

Temelji se na istraživanju i aktivnom sudjelovanju u procesu stvaranja i stjecanja znanja.

Collaboration

Learning through collaboration mainly embraces discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself

Figure A1.19 Front of Croatian translation of ABC collaboration card.
Source: SRCE, University of Zagreb.

Tradicionalna metoda	Digitalna tehnologija
<input type="checkbox"/> rad na projektu u malim grupama	<input type="checkbox"/> rad na projektima u malim grupama uporabom alata: forum, wiki, chat i sl.
<input type="checkbox"/> komentiranje radova drugih polaznika (rasprava)	<input type="checkbox"/> komentiranje radova drugih polaznika uporabom alata: forum, wiki, chat i sl
<input type="checkbox"/> zajednički rad na zadatku	<input type="checkbox"/> zajednički rad na online zadatku
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure A1.20 Back of Croatian translation of ABC collaboration card.
Source: SRCE, University of Zagreb.

Collaboration

- Discussion of others' outputs in physical classroom space and/or online
- Peer-review cycle
- Building a joint output together (e.g. a wiki, website, glossary, report, presentation or video)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Prompts:

- Are learners given time to work on projects in class, as well as out of class?
- Are learners prepared for engaging in group work? If so, how?
- Do learners have choice in their group project? Why (or why not)?

See the DCU 'ABC to VLE+ App Wheel' (<http://dcuh5p.com/abc>) for further guidance on **Collaboration** activities.

Figure A1.21 Back of collaboration card localised by (and for) Dublin City University. *Source:* © CC BY NC SA DCU Localised Learning Types Cards V4.9, collaboration card, Claire Gormley and Mark Glynn.

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Appendix 2

Evaluating ABC: does it work?

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

In 2018 UCL was awarded two-year Erasmus+ funding to develop ABC with 12 European universities. The Erasmus project built a strategic partnership between UCL, six other universities from the League of European Research Universities (Amsterdam, Helsinki, Leuven, Milan and the Sorbonne, with Oxford as an associate) and six innovative universities from across Europe: VIVES (Belgium), Absalon (Denmark), Zagreb (Croatia), Tallinn (Estonia), Dublin City (Ireland) and Timișoara (Romania). The project was an opportunity to evaluate ABC beyond the UK and with a wider range of institutions.¹ An evaluation questionnaire was agreed by the partners (ABC-LD Toolkit 2020) who ran 84 ABC Learning Design workshops in 11 countries, with more than 1035 participants. Feedback was sought from over 60 of the workshops and the project team received 344 participant responses and a further 42 follow-up responses, about whether they had implemented their plans. In addition, 62 facilitator surveys were received, describing how the workshops had been run. The narrative below covers the main findings, the full report is available online.

These observations of expectations, impact and support, and format of the workshop may provide facilitators who are new to ABC a useful validation of the approach.

1. The workshop format

The format itself was widely considered to be good or excellent. This is significant, as the workshop by necessity has to be run by a wide range of facilitators and this requires it to be robust enough to respond to different presentational and facilitator styles (Figure A2.1).

Overall appreciation	Rating	Material appreciation
38.1%	Excellent	45.9%
48.5%	Good	43.6%
8.4%	Average	7.0%
2.9%	Poor	1.5%
2.1%	Missing	2.0%

Figure A2.1 Appreciation of the format of the workshop. *Source:* A derivative of CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, Erasmus+ project, ABC to VLE: beyond curriculum design, ABC to VLE evaluation resources produced by VIVES and KU Leuven <https://abc-ld.org/evaluation/>.

One reliable indicator of success of any workshop is the likelihood of personal recommendation, and again this was found to be overwhelmingly positive, with 92.4 per cent of participants indicating that they would recommend the workshop to a colleague.

Comments from the participants reflected these scores.

- ‘It’s very hands-on and the vibe somehow makes you feel very excited about implementing the ideas that the workshop generated.’
- ‘It was excellent to see a focused and well-structured meeting in action, with something of substance to show for it at the end of the session.’
- ‘It provides you with a “new” way of thinking about yourself as a teacher and the design of your course.’
- ‘A surprisingly quick yet efficient way to view module/programme design: very practical and gave the opportunity to see it as a whole and at a glance, ensuring that a range of learning and assessment methods were incorporated.’
- ‘It is also a more activity-oriented rather than content-based way of thinking about (online) courses.’
- ‘It was intense, focused, innovative and facilitated extremely well.’
- ‘Fantastic tool for visualising the course module which has led to reflection regarding the structure for different courses.’

2. Impact of the workshop

The workshop format is certainly engaging and enjoyable, but, to participants, did it have a value beyond that? (Figure A2.2).

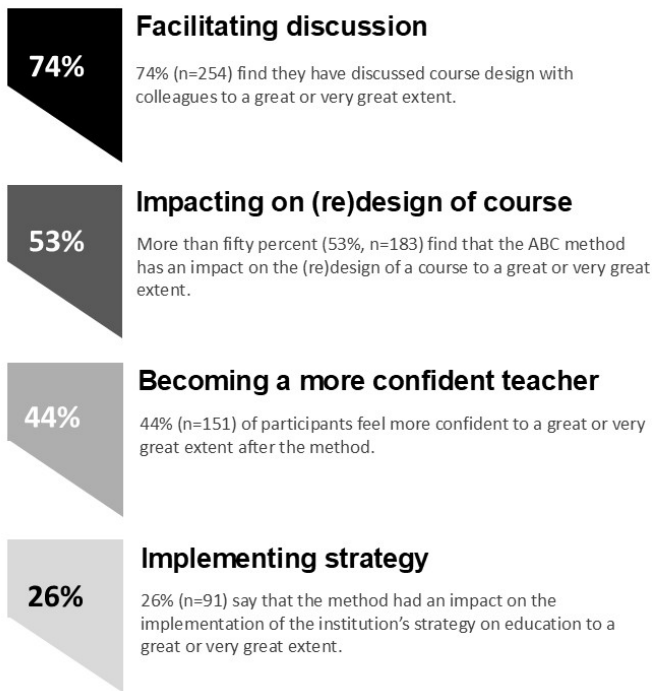


Figure A2.2 To what extent did you reach the following outcomes by the end of the workshop? *Source:* A derivative of CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, Erasmus+ project, ABC to VLE: beyond curriculum design, ABC to VLE evaluation resources produced by VIVES and KU Leuven <https://abc-ld.org/evaluation>.

The view of participants that the workshop encourages discussion is not surprising and the simple opportunity, perhaps permission, to discuss how to design the student journey, in a non-judgemental, collegiate atmosphere, is always much appreciated. A small majority found it had an impact on course redesign. Given that the workshop is about learning design, one might expect the second figure to be higher, but it should be remembered, ABC is a short-form intervention with academic teams, with little or no preparation. The key to raising this figure may be in the follow-up activities and institutional support for the workshop. Redesign of a course, in terms of changes, may not be the only desirable outcome. The analysis, discussion and sharing of the pedagogical justification of the current course design may be invaluable in itself. This co-creative perspective relates to the following observation.

The finding that participants feel themselves to be more confident teachers, after ABC, is as unexpected as it is pleasing. We often saw that the openness of ABC can help validate current practices and designs

among peers. Teachers can be quite self-critical of their own methods but may find, when discussing with colleagues, that the underlying rationale is quite robust and may require only minor adjustments. Thus, even if few changes are made to the design, the outcome can be satisfying. Not all workshops (at least prior to the pandemic) focus on implementing educational strategy or policy, so it was almost surprising that over a quarter of respondents recognised a strategic component.

Respondents were asked if ABC helped them think about the following (figures represent 'to some extent' or more):

- my course from students' perspective (82.9 per cent)
- my teaching methods (88.2 per cent)
- educational technology (80.5 per cent)
- my assessment and feedback methods (82.9 per cent)
- my institution's strategy on education (59.6 per cent)
- the learning outcomes of the course (74.1 per cent)

The data corroborated with comments from respondents:

- 'It really made us think and discuss about the role of educational technology in our own classrooms, our reasons for (not) using it and the societal need for all of us to use them in our teaching.'
- 'My institution is trying to change their education and their philosophy. This could be a good tool to start a discussion.'
- 'The changes are gradual and very much work in progress during the ongoing semester.'

3. Post workshop activities

The project wanted to know what happened after the workshops (Figure A2.3).

Participants were often keen to continue the conversation with colleagues, beyond the workshop. Although only a small majority had said earlier that the workshop itself improved course design, it was encouraging that substantially more wanted to continue the (re)design of their course and many thought of applying the approach to other courses. The workshop may also provide a starting point for further staff development, as participants saw the need to look for more information on certain topics. It may be concluded that the impact of the workshop,

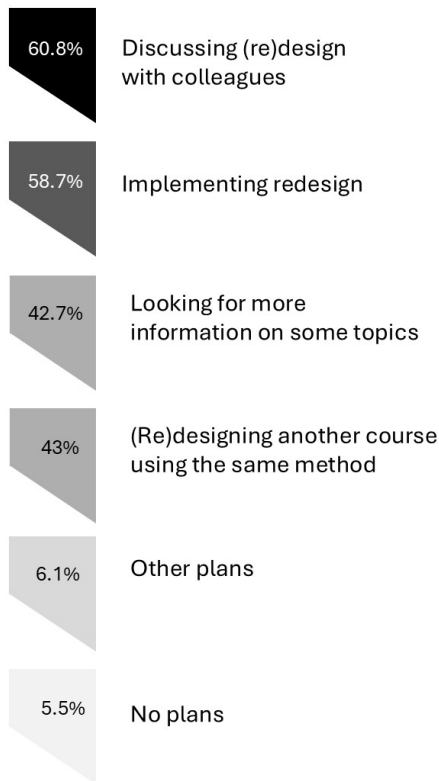


Figure A2.3 What are you planning to do with the outcome(s) of the workshop? *Source:* A derivative of CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, Erasmus+ project, ABC to VLE: beyond curriculum design, ABC to VLE evaluation resources produced by VIVES and KU Leuven <https://abc-ld.org/evaluation>.

for participants and teams, can be enhanced by post-workshop support of various forms. In a follow-up question, 65.4 per cent of participants wanted more discussion with colleagues and/or workshop participants and 40.1 per cent wanted information or materials on specific topics, with a quarter mentioning follow-on training. Other topics suggested were (financial) resources, feedback on their design, and design at the programme level.

4. Improvements

Overall, participants were happy with the discussion with colleagues and codevelopment, the materials and the structure of the workshop:

- ‘The creative process of working as a group was an essential part of the workshop which helped us to understand the method more deeply.’
- ‘The cards and poster part was great, it helped creativity while offering tools and facilitating the process!’
- ‘Simple structure of the workshop. It enables holding the attention of the participants and curiosity.’

Respondents also suggested improvements to aspects of the workshop:

- give more time for discussion
- clarify and give background on the six learning activities
- ask participants to come prepared with a choice of module or course to (re)design and its learning outcomes
- shorten and focus the introduction
- keep groups small and homogeneous
- take time to consolidate at the end

The tension between giving enough background at the beginning of the workshop and too much of an introduction is always difficult to resolve. In theory participants could be given pre-workshop activities to enable a faster start, but people new to the method may not feel the need to engage and there was, at UCL at least, a certain serendipity in who turns up for the workshop. Some institutions have integrated ABC into a more formal staff development workflow, but that also depends largely on context and resources. The evaluation also covered facilitator responses, and these can be found in the full report.

Note

1 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2018-1-UK01-KA203-048123>.

Reference

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Appendix 3

ABC tool wheels

Clive Young, Nataša Perović, Leo Havemann
and Karen Shackelford-Cesare

Although not part of the classic ABC workshop format, many facilitators have found the ABC tool wheel (sometimes known as the ABC App Wheel) a useful supplement to design work, especially when discussing blended or online modes with teachers. During workshops there is usually limited time to discuss the technologies available, so the tool wheel was developed as a post-workshop support solution, to help teachers decide what digital tools they might use in their learning designs. In this way the pedagogic design process and the technical implementation can be closely linked.

Several app wheels of educational apps and tools have long been available, but for ABC we wanted to modify them in two ways (Figures A3.1 and A3.2)

1. Map the tools against the Laurillard learning activity types, thus creating a clear connection to the ABC storyboards.
2. Highlight tools supported by the institution, so educators were aware of the risk of using non-supported tools. The virtual learning environment (VLE) or learning management system (LMS) used by the institution will often dictate most of the supported tools available.

The range of available educational tools in an institution is thus presented as a wheel, classified in the six learning type activities that are used in ABC. Teachers can immediately see which tools are available locally, for their chosen learning activities. The tool wheel may be divided into two or three concentric sections (from the inside out):

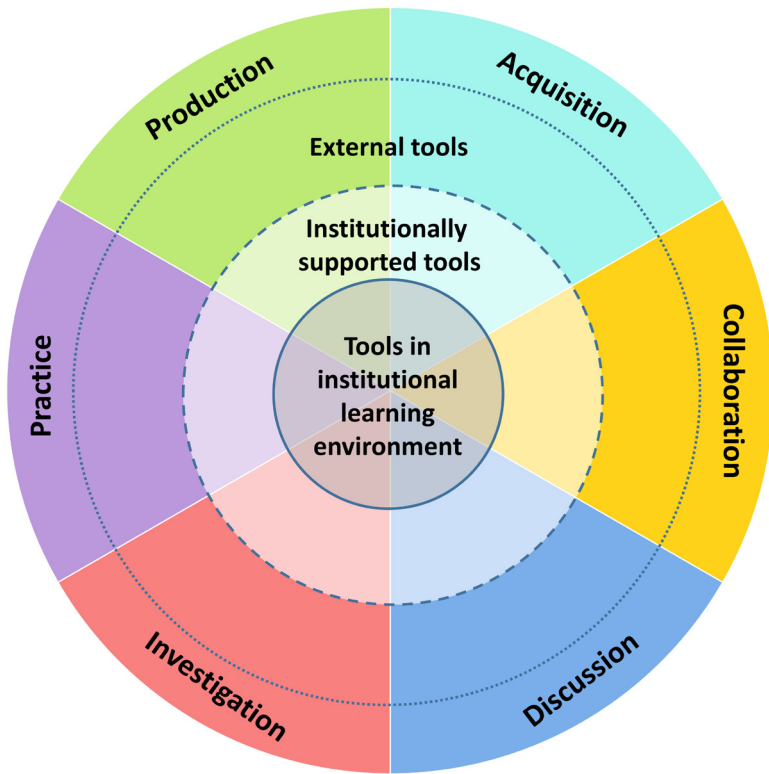


Figure A3.1 UCL tool wheel 2020. *Source:* © Editors.

- institutionally supported tools, such as those available within, or integrated with, the VLE or LMS
- recommended tools
- recognised tools

Some institutions have made this visual representation clickable, so that additional information about the tool, or examples of use, pop up when clicked. Good examples are the University of Auckland¹ and University of Plymouth.²

Although a tool wheel is designed to stand on its own, to support teachers independently in some universities, it is the subject of an academic development workshop where attendees have the chance to see, and possibly try out, the tools. In [Chapter 3](#) we saw how VIVES used both online and workshop approaches to support their change initiative.

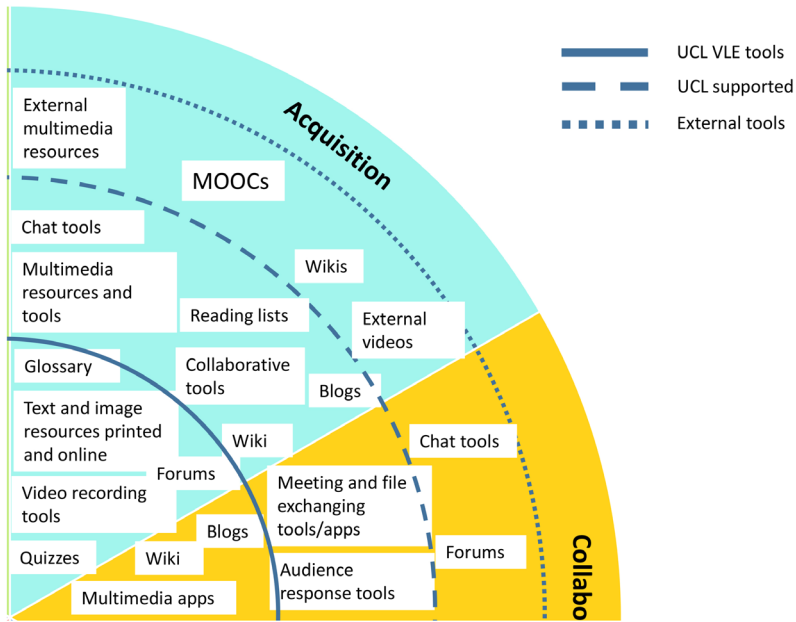


Figure A3.2 UCL tool wheel 2020 (expanded section). *Source:* © ABC Learning Design.

The tools in the wheel are subject to change. For this reason, the wheel is usually in a digital format, so it can be updated and disseminated very quickly. One approach pioneered at UCL was to invite technical and academic support colleagues to workshop the wheel, to identify supported tools and apps and their pedagogical utility and map them on a blank wheel template. Technical support colleagues found this process especially interesting, and a similar exercise with students and teaching colleagues provided very different ‘maps’ of the institution’s digital environment.

Notes

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ABC Learning Design is a popular and effective rapid design method for developing educational programmes, modules and short courses. Created at UCL in 2015, ABC enables academic teams to collaborate in short, focused workshops to co-create visual storyboards of students' learning journeys. Its ease of use, adaptability and open licence have led to widespread adoption across the UK, Europe and beyond.


ABC Learning Design: Active, blended, connected and beyond introduces ABC to a new audience, adding insights from institutions that have localised and implemented the method in diverse contexts. ABC provides practical, ready-to-use tools, but it is often reframed as more than a set of resources. Its built-in flexibility not only allows for transferability but actively encourages creative modifications that respond to institutional needs. The core ABC workshop remains the heart of the method and is central to all implementations. Around this, institutions have built locally relevant adaptations that retain the method's participatory ethos. This shared structure creates a design lingua franca that supports collaboration within and across institutions. Drawing on facilitator and participant experiences, the book reviews ABC's key strengths and explains why it continues to inspire innovation. It invites a global conversation on enriching learning design for students, faculty and institutions alike.

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