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Assessing Life Design and evaluating its impact on the learning experience: A conceptual overview and emergent framework based on the Designing Futures Programme at University of Galway, Ireland

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Futures Programme at University of Galway, Ireland

Abstract

In complex and challenging times, with the increasing imperative to advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, comes the call for new pedagogical approaches, which move education from a transactional to a reciprocal partnership with business and society, helping us to educate the best-prepared and optimally-skilled graduates for the future.

To support transforming business for good, a number of thought-leaders thus advocate for a radical change to higher education, one which enables universities to be more agile and responsive to the serious challenges ahead in delivering the UN's seventeen SDGs. This paper outlines an innovative university-wide initiative (substantially funded by the Irish Government, €7.57m over five years, 2020-2025) to foundationally change the way academic curriculum is designed and delivered, in partnership with local, regional and multinational industry and society. The purpose of this programme, Designing Futures, is to radically re-envision the way the university collaborates with business, cultural and civic partners.

In Designing Futures, students, faculty, key stakeholders and industry work together to co-design learning; employ new educational technologies (e.g. virtual reality); and engage in research-based innovation projects focused on global grand challenges, aligned with the UN's SDGs. Galway is a centre in Ireland and internationally for the medtech industry as well as world-renowned for its creative and arts sectors. There are nine named business and community partners collaborating with Designing Futures; these include Boston Scientific, Veryan, Aerogen, Channel Mechanics, Mbyronics, SAP, Galway International Arts Festival, Rent the Runway; and Medtronic. This article focuses on a specific innovation within Designing Futures called Life Design. Originally developed at Stanford University and further developed at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, Design Your Life or Life Design is a systematic learning approach and set of tools that can enable learners to discern the best, most fulfilling path, not only in their career, but in their lives in general. Designing

Futures represents the first time Life Design has been introduced as a credit-bearing module within the curriculum of an Irish tertiary level institution. As with any such novel educational initiative, there is an educational requirement to measure its efficacy as an innovative learning intervention. This paper examines how the first iteration of Life Design within the curriculum has been assessed and its impact evaluated. Not only is this useful in the context of Designing Futures, but it shows how innovative university learning can be assessed, in potentially transforming business for good.

Key words: Life design, education, measurement

1 Introduction

Transitions become the norm and not the exception. People at all ages and stages in their lives need support to proactively manage their career and life transitions. This applies for the younger person to find an education or transition into their first job to the mid-age being caught up in dichotomous thinking of “shall I stay or shall I go” to the soon-to-retire with another 10, 20 and even 30 years of lifetime to enjoy and proactively design (Gratton & Scott, 2016; Gratton, Scott & Caulkin, 2016; Sims & Carstensen, 2017).

A new approach called Design Your Life or Life Design combining the innovation method design thinking with positive psychology supports people and organizations to proactively design those transitions, overcoming procrastination and bringing more of themselves into the future (Kernbach & Eppler, 2020; Kernbach 2022; Kernbach & Eppler, 2022). Through Life Design, participants are introduced to a range of resources and tools that they can use at any point in their lives to help them to discern the best, most informed path forward (Burnett & Evans, 2016). It can help with making important decisions by supporting the exploration of one’s interests and talents, and furthermore how one can take practical steps towards a more self-actualised future. The aim is to take participants through a structured, creative and engaging process which helps them to design the best life that might be possible for them. To exemplify the Life Design approach, one of the tools used is Prototyping. Engaging in Prototyping: having earlier identified new talents or ideas they would like to develop, participants are then encouraged and supported to *prototype* or test these out practically. For example, if Maria has identified changing career from one industry to another, she then takes practical steps to see how she can explore whether this may indeed be the right choice for her. She might speak to someone working in the industry and shadow them, spending time testing out whether she would like to pursue this particular career path further.

The overall idea of Life Design is to help people reflect on their life and career choices to-date, either to affirm those decisions, or provide a structured space to explore how their life can be improved or enhanced, on both personal and professional levels.

First research findings show positive effects of the Life Design approach, e.g., the development of psychological capital consisting of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Bresciani & Kernbach, 2020) as well as better emotion regulation in times of transition through visual thinking, showing empathy, building a positive terminology and others (Rehnert & Kernbach, 2020a; Rehnert & Kernbach, 2020b). As the Life Design approach becomes more popular around the world and more scholars start their enquiries about showing the effects of this approach, it is timely to show different (teaching) cases to share knowledge and learn from each other to ultimately synthesize existing research efforts and measures to orchestrate possible measurement options into a framework to inform and align future research efforts around the notion of life design.

Furthermore, this paper is situated specifically within the Life Design Track of the EURAM Entrepreneurship Special Interest Group: *T03_14 – Life Design – Integrating Design Thinking, Positive Psychology and Behavioral Economics*. Therefore, by developing our understanding of inclusive Life Design assessment and evaluation, the research reported here contributes to the Life Design EURAM Track in addressing the following SDGs in particular: *Goal 3: Good health and well-being for people; Goal 4: Quality education; Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth; and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure*.

While it grows in its popularity across many domains including entrepreneurship education, the literature is currently lacking specifically in terms of how we effectively assess and evaluate Life Design, with and for learners. As a research team introducing Life Design within the academic curriculum for the first time, we are in a position to report on our journey

so far in the assessment and evaluation of this exciting, high-potential educational development.

Therefore, in this paper, we set out to give an overview of both qualitative and quantitative measures that have been used and seem applicable to be used in the future. We are drawing from our own experiences and research projects as well as borrowing from other areas and disciplines where we see a fit with the life design approach and possible outcomes. Second, we would like to portray how life design can be part of a more comprehensive programme at university to support students in their employability and their ability to design their future.

2 Life design – What to consider when measuring and assessing its impact

Universities play a central role in supporting students in their transition from being a student to shaping their lives afterwards. Life design can support students in many facets given its versatile approach. The assessment and measurement of life design includes many issues to consider when including life design in the curriculum. The following components help to set up a life design curriculum and answer why, what, how, when and who to measure.

2.1 Why measure?

First of all, it is about understanding the effects that life design interventions and courses have. It is both about measuring the effects quantitatively using scales as well as measuring the course through qualitative approaches. Given the versatile approach of life design, educators have to ask themselves what they are aiming, e.g., developing entrepreneurial skills, building psychological capital, supporting problem-capabilities or others.

2.2 What to measure?

The question is what needs to be measured to show the benefits and effects of life design. Is it about skills which are predominantly discussed around the concept of employability or is it beyond skills and rather about a holistic concept such as student capital (Tomlinson, 2017).

If creative problem-solving needs to be measured, then scales around creative self-efficacy as well as problem finding and problem solving might be considered. If it comes to the ability of entrepreneurial thinking, other measures might play a role. If it is beyond the technical side of being employable but also about supporting student to create a fulfilling life for themselves,

which might be the role of modern universities, then measures such as well-being, psychological capital and emotion regulation might be added.

There are many quantitative measures that could be considered when it comes to life design. Here is a list of measures that could be candidates for quantitative measurement: (1) psychological capital consisting of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience (Lorenz, Beer, Pütz & Heinitz, 2016), (2) growth mindset (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015), (3) meaning in life (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006), (4) career anxiety (Berger-Gross, Kahn & Weare, 1983), (5) grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), (6) future orientation (Crespo, Jose, Kieplikowski & Pryor, 2013), (7) career motivation (Noe, Noe & Bachhuber, 1990), (8) feedback orientation (Linderbaum & Lexy, 2010), (9) well-being through PERMA dimensions (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2015; Butler & Kern, 2016), and (10) career decision-making (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

In addition to the quantitative measures, one could use qualitative measure such as (1) emotional self-regulation, e.g., through reflection analysis, learning and reflections through focus group data, (3) digital storytelling, (4) and social connection and support.

2.3 How to measure

If it comes to quantitative measures such as psychological capital, data can be collected through surveys conducted before and after the course, ideally with a control group consisting of people who did not take part in the course.

In addition, qualitative measures could be used, such as focus groups, the analysis of journals or learning reflections through assignment. New methods such as digital storytelling could also be employed.

2.4 When to measure

Measurement could be conducted straight before and straight after an intervention or course.

Ideally also longer after the course, e.g., a month later, 3 months later and 6 months later.

Ideally longitudinal data could be collected over a longer period of time to see whether the effects sustain.

2.5 Who to measure

The measurement would include students participating in the course. However, instructors of life design courses could also be strongly affected by teaching life design and engaging with students about very personal topics. Therefore, the effects on staff could also be considered to be measured.

Having outlined key questions to consider when assessing and measuring life design activities such as courses, the following teaching case study at the University of Galway in Ireland gives some empirical insights into how the assessment and measurement is rolled out practice. Given the size of the entire project and life design being one part of it, it shows learnings and poses questions beyond a single course point of view.

3 The Galway Teaching Case - Assessment for learning and evaluation of Life Design

The following chapter describes the larger project “Designing Futures” at the University of Galway and its strategies, outcomes, as well as learnings from assessing learning and evaluating life design.

The key European policy framework: *EntreComp* highlights the importance of fifteen entrepreneurship competences, which include “Self-awareness and self-efficacy”, “Creativity” and “Learning through experience”, all underpinned by a bias to action.

A reflective and structured methodology such as Life Design, which also crucially promotes a bias to action, can help to develop these competence domains in our entrepreneurship curricula and programmes. Consequently, in the Designing Futures programme, we are using Life Design, alongside a range of new ways of collaborating with business and industry and employing new technologies, to transform students’ learning experience.

In Designing Futures, we have created transdisciplinary elective modules that enhance students’ professional skills, designed by experts from across the university and with input from our enterprise partners. IdeasLab, a core pillar of the Designing Futures project, is a new physical, interactive space where our community of students, enterprise partners, alumni and staff are engaged in design thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship to advance innovation in and for the world. Designing Futures also contributes to students’ holistic and rounded education through specialised personal development, student success coaching and Life Design. Designing Futures recognises, enhances and supports the totality of students’ experience at third-level, so that they will graduate well-equipped for the world of today, and tomorrow.

Such is the potential of Life Design, and particularly within the Designing Futures programme, we have in 2022-2023 introduced it as a credit-bearing module, available to students to complete for full academic assessment; the first time this has been done in an Irish university.

In this way, the Designing Future programme is a response to Bok (2020) who poses the question as to whether today's universities are succeeding in meeting the educational needs of this generation of students. While this question was especially prescient prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, given the challenges of climate change, the knowledge-based economy, and pace of technological development, it is especially apt given the disruption of educational provision over the past number of years. In an Irish context, participation rates in Higher Education (HE) are relatively high as 58% of 25–34-year-olds hold a third-level qualification, compared to the EU average of 41% (Eurostat, 2020). Given these high levels of participation and the increasing complexity of the demands that will await these new graduates, a plethora of academic and student support services are developing with the aim of ensuring a valued and worthwhile student experience in HE (O'Farrell, 2019).

This specific study described below is located within a wider project called, Designing Futures (DF). This is a flagship university programme which aims to support students to design their own personalised learning journey, equipping them for both their future lives and careers. The DF Project is a comprehensive package of supports comprising of a range of inputs to enhance student outcomes. These include facilitating the roll out of transdisciplinary elective modules; participation in research-led, vertically integrated projects (VIPs), establishing IdeasLab, a design centric approach to entrepreneurial education and streamlining the awards framework for elective curricular and co-curricular achievements.

Specifically for the purposes of this paper, the focus is on assessment within and evaluation of the Design Your Life (DYL) Module and the Student Success Coaching Programme (SSC), both of which are based on the Life Design approach.

3.1. Programme Description

The Designing Futures team have introduced the first University of Galway's in curriculum "Design your Life" (DYL) for-credit module. Developed and delivered jointly by the Student Success Coaching Team and the Designing Futures' Director of Director of Educational Design Research, this 5 ECTS module utilised the design tools and templates developed in the Stanford Life Design Lab. The team identified the following learning outcomes for the module, which students should have achieved on completion of the course:

- Identify and describe Designing Your Life concepts, methods and tools that can be helpful in discerning the best professional and life path;
- Select and apply, as is personally best for them, Designing Your Life tools for a given work and life decision;
- Critically and creatively, in an informed way, (using Designing Your Life), discuss work and life decisions.

Throughout the 12-week, semester-long programme, the participants were introduced to a range of design your life tools and approaches. Students are asked to conduct three sets of assigned work for this module. They complete reflections on both the "Workview/Lifeview" tool and the "Odyssey" planning tool. In addition, they develop and submit a digital story based on their experiences on the module as a reflective methodology to evidence their learning. The following table outlines the Life Design subject matters and topics covered during each week of the module. Each of the weekly classes lasts two hours.

Session	Content
1	<u>Life Design Introduction</u> Introduction to the Module
2	<u>Workview and Wayfinding Intro</u> Introduction to Design Your Life principles Workview Exploration & Reflection Students employ a new practice (wayfinding) to think about and organize their University experience
3	<u>Making Your Strengths Work for You</u> Understand the benefits of working to your strengths Explore your personal top 5 strengths Plan to maximise your strengths over the next year How to spot strengths in others
4	<u>Coherence</u> Worldview and Workview Integration
5	<u>Story Telling and Narrative Design</u> Introduction to Digital Storytelling
6	<u>Odyssey Planning</u> How many lives are you? Students imagine the narrative of 3 possible futures (Odyssey plans) that might unfold for them.
7	<u>Prototyping Your Odyssey</u> Understand the role of prototyping in the design process and its importance in building failure immunity.
8	<u>Life Design Essentials</u> Positive Psychology, Energy Mapping, Decision-Making
9	<u>Group Coaching</u>
10	<u>Digital Storytelling</u> Developing your Script
11	<u>Gratitude, Energy Flow</u> Mind mapping, Gratefulness Debrief, Energy Flow
12	<u>End of Module Reflection</u> Wrap up activity Evaluation Focus Group

Table 1: Programme overview of 12-week DYL programme

As well as the Life Design module, the content of which is outlined above, students can engage with Student Success Coaching, which can significantly augment their Life Design learning.

Student Success Coaching is a coaching service for students delivered through a number of interventions such as, one to one individual coaching, small group coaching or through themed workshops (in curriculum, co-curricular or extra-curricular). Coaching helps students decide on actions to move forward, encouraging them to learn more about themselves and how they can succeed in achieving their goals. Student Success Coaches support students to take an active role in ‘designing their lives’ to achieve their unique academic, personal and life goals

during their time at University of Galway. Students are supported to complement their subject-specific skills with professional skills delivered via curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Students can work with a coach to:

- Recognise strengths and natural talents and gain insight about what they naturally do best – complete the Gallup Clifton Strengths assessment
- Navigate successful transition into university life and community
- Increase confidence and focus on personal development to maximise goals, talents, interests and curiosities
- Make decisions about educational and professional goals to make the most of their potential - including module choices
- Design network and explore co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities that can complement and support their degree

3.2 Theoretical Approach

Both the DYL module and Student Success Coaching support programmes are based on the life design approach developed by Burnett and Evans (2016). Central to this is imparting to students, the potential that arises from applying the engineering tools and techniques of design thinking to the wicked problem of life design. To do this, they caution, “designers don’t think their way forward. Designers build their way forward” (Burnett and Evans 2016, xxv). The outcome of their work has culminated in the Stanford Design Your Life/Life Design course which offers students access to a series of tools and templates designed to help them move from “dysfunctional beliefs” to “reframing” with a “bias to action” as a methodology to address their career and life decision making (Burnett and Evans, 2016).

The University of Galway Life Design undergraduate module and the SSC initiatives represent the first iteration of this approach within an Irish third level institution. The research team have identified three core underpinning theoretical frameworks core to the implementation of these initiatives. These are:

- Design Thinking: The application of design thinking in this context is in an example of an issue that requires “a human-centred, creative, iterative, and practical approach to finding the best ideas and ultimate solutions. (Brown 2008, 8).
- Emergent Adulthood: Arnett (2015) coined this term as a new phase of the life cycle. It has been created by the prolonged period in Western societies between leaving school as adolescence and becoming full adult members of society through marriage and parenthood. During this interregnum, Arnett describes the five features of emergent adulthood as the ages of identity explorations, instability, feeling in-between and the most self-focused age (Arnett 2015, 8).
- Self-Authorship: This theory developed by Baxter Magolda (2001) builds on Kegan’s (1994) work on adult self-development. Self-authorship is the “internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identify and social relations” (Baxter Magolda 2001, 269). It is particularly focused on the progression of young people as they explore their own values and outlook on life and make decisions on their life course.

3.3 Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation function for the wider project seeks to maintain an evidence base of project implementation and learning as it unfolds and to collate evidence that can be used to support the project sustainability. In relation to the DYL and SSC initiatives, the team have set the following objectives to guide the conduct of the evaluation:

1. To undertake a formative evaluation tracking the development of project content, implementation and participation.
2. To explore the perspectives of students and staff regarding their experiences of DYL and SSC supports.
3. To reflect on how these initiatives can be conceptualised, enhanced and further developed.

According to Rossi “evaluations must be tailored to the political and organisational content of the programme to be evaluated. It typically involves assessment of one or more of the five program domains: a) the need for the program, b) the design of the program, c) the program implementation and service delivery, d) the program impact or outcomes, and e) program efficiency” (1999, 35).

As this evaluation is being conducted during the programme’s first iteration in the university, it will by necessity focus on the first three of those five program domains. In so doing, it is more correctly termed a formative evaluation. Stufflebeam and Coryn set out the rationale for conducting formative evaluations: “Basically, they provide feedback for improvement. They are prospective and proactive. They are typically conducted during development of a program or its ongoing operation. Formative evaluations offer guidance to those who are responsible for ensuring and improving the program’s quality and who should, in doing so, pay close attention to the nature and needs of the program’s consumers.” (2014, 21).

Given the degree of complexity in tracking the implementation of this multi-stakeholder initiative, the team decided to utilize the CIPP Model of Evaluation (Stufflebeam, 2003). By selecting this systematic approach, it is possible to track the project implementation using the CIPP Evaluation Checklist to consider its *context* -what needs to be done; *input* - how should

it be done; *process* - is it being done and *product* - did it succeed (Stufflebeam, 2003). Figure 1 sets out the plan to apply this approach to this evaluation.

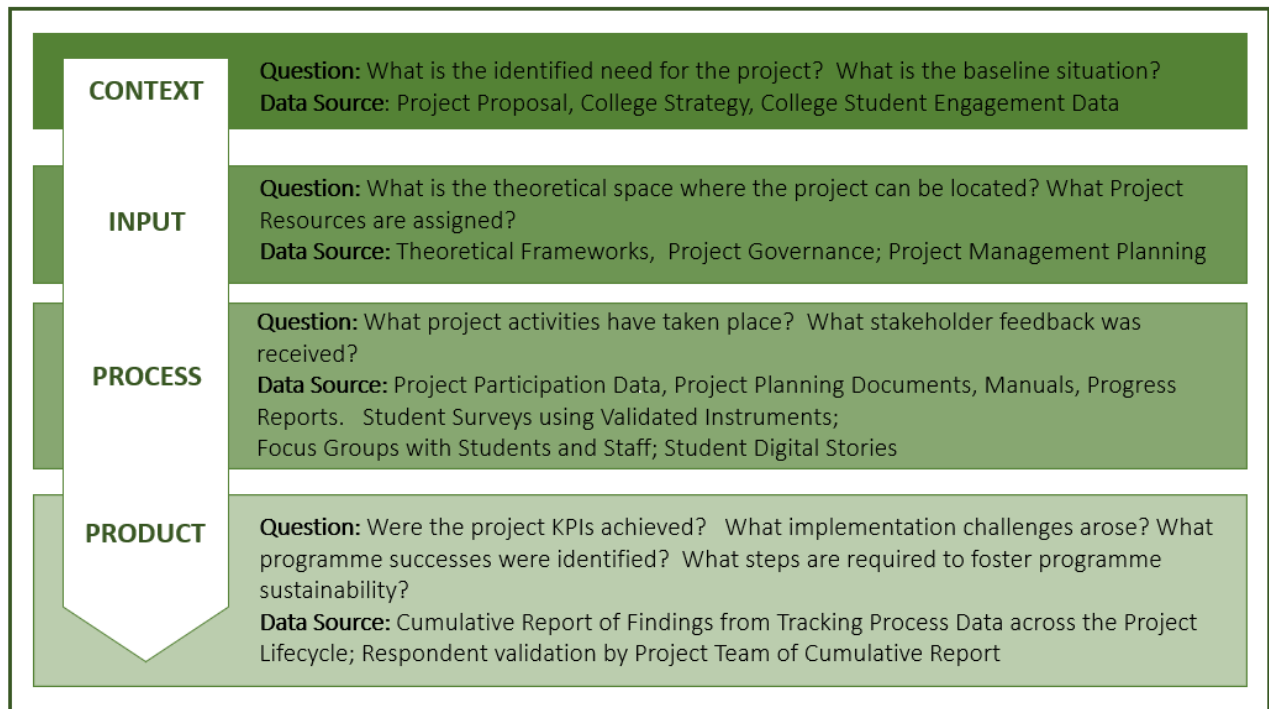


Figure 1: Application of the CIPP Model for Formative Evaluation

Context: The work of the evaluation team is rooted in the overarching project proposal as this sets out the project aims and objectives. These are understood in the context of the relevant higher education policies in Ireland, the current status of student engagement within the university and university strategic plans in the student engagement space.

Input: As the evaluation of the DYL module and SSC programme progresses, the data collected will be interrogated against the theoretical frameworks identified, namely, Design Thinking, Emergent Adulthood and Self-authorship. The impact of project resources to deliver the programme aims will also be tracked.

Process: In total, four main types of data will be used to track project implementation. These are project participation data and progress reports, focus groups with students and staff, student

self-reports on validated surveys and student digital stories. All qualitative interviews and focus groups will be transcribed in full. Interview transcripts, documents and digital story telling outputs will be coded using the qualitative analysis software, NVivo and a thematic analysis of topics will be undertaken (Braun & Clarke 2022). The surveys will consist of a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions. Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative survey data will be analysed using thematic analysis. Participation Data will be used to aid the analysis and provide information on project take up etc. In keeping with Mixed Methods approaches, all findings will be inter-linked in order to develop a comprehensive account of programme implementation and in response to each of the research objectives. (Creswell, 2018).

Product: When considering the product evaluation, the team will focus on whether the project KPIs have been achieved. It will also consider how the findings from the process evaluation can be used to explore a range of analytical questions such as

- Are there any unintended or contextual influences impacting the projects that were not foreseen?
- Is there a need to refine the approach?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project as it is currently being implemented?
- What works for whom in what ways and under what conditions?

In keeping with the principles of Developmental Evaluation (Patton, 2011), the evaluation will unfold in an iterative manner where data collected through the process and product evaluation will be shared with the team each semester and used to inform developmental adjustments to the programme. These developments will be tracked through project governance structures,

reports, and records. A mind map has been developed to describe the overarching components in the evaluation plan and how these inter-relate.

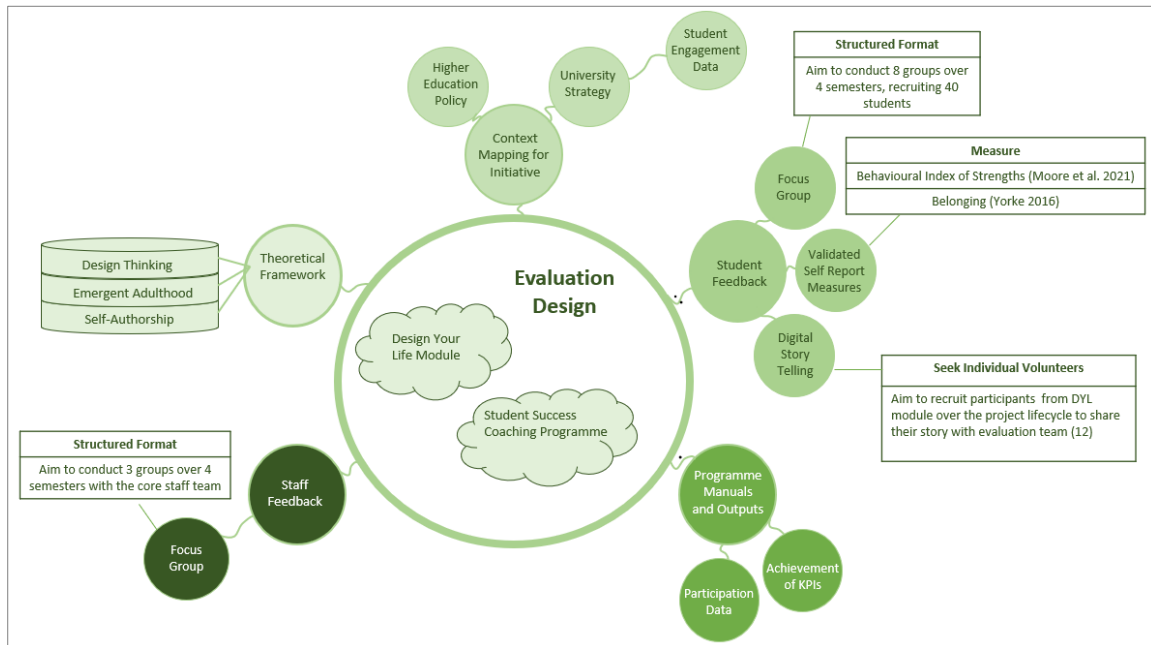


Figure 2: Case Study Evaluation Design

4 Formative Evaluation of the Life Design module

In September 2022, the Designing Futures team introduced the first in curriculum “Design your Life” for-credit module. Developed and delivered jointly by the Student Success Coaching Team and the Designing Futures, Director of Director of Educational Design Research, this 5 ECTS module utilised the design tools and templates developed in the Stanford Life Design Lab. 16 students participated in the first iteration of the module.

4.1 Student Focus Group

All course participants were invited to take part in a focus group with the evaluator after the final teaching session on the last day of the module. A total of 7 students agreed to take part. The profile of students in the focus group was broadly representative of the overall course participants. All focus groups members were registered with the College of Science and Engineering, 6 in 2nd year and one in 3rd year. The gender balance was 4 females and 3 males. The semi-structured interview process was used to explore the students' feedback. The session was audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were then imported in the NVIVO software package analysed. Findings are presented below according to the key themes that were identified in the data.

4.2 Positive experience

The students reported that this was a very positive experience and would certainly recommend it to other students. When asked for particular highlights, a range of comments were made. For some students, they really enjoyed learning about the *DYL tools and approaches*. Others focused on the opportunity this type of module provided them to be more *creative*, to practice *decision making, critical thinking and planning* skills.

“I think it's good, because all the science we're doing in general, not all of us, but a lot of us have so many options going forward. Because you know, science is massive. I think it's really good because I have a lot of decisions to make. And the decision making is ready to good for that”

The module also offered students a chance to *build connections with others*. The nature of this module allowed students to work in small groups and to get to know each other. This was in contrast to most of their other modules and as a welcome change. A number of students enjoyed the activities where they had to offer feedback to each other's ideas and

reported that it was good to be able to identify with some of the experiences of others when shared in the group activities.

“Another thing was groups like, when we split into groups, then you actually got to know the six people in the group. And then when we got up and put the sticky notes on the board, it was like good to see similar, everyone having the same kind of stuff. So like, you can say, someone was scared of spiders same as me, or school was stressful. It was nice to see you weren’t alone”

Related to this was the opportunity to *get to know staff* and feel comfortable to be able to follow up with them outside of sessions.

“It actually does make the distance between student and staff a bit closer because I’m intimidated to talk to any or email, any lectures or anything...knowing that their actual staff that and how to talk to them and even reaching out to the success coaches is a good thing. Because normally, that distance from me is normally massive”

4.3 Why do this module?

Students were asked why they had registered for this module. Across the 7 focus group participants, approximately half registered based they had initially received an option they hadn’t wanted and asked for *an alternative*.

“Honestly, I just got put into it. I got chemistry and I hate chemistry. So, I said, listen, anything else? Yeah. So, they gave me some electives instead, but I’m happy I got this”

The remaining students did sign up specifically for the module, although they differed in the *amount of knowledge*, they had about the module beforehand. Only one student had fully researched the module and reported that she felt informed about the content prior to module selection.

“I did choose it, I did read up on it. And I'm just interested in planning for myself. And I don't really like completely academic things. So I did actually read about it. It was a nice option”

For a number of students, they had added this module to their selection less as it offered them an *opportunity to meet with people*.

“It was the first module where we're kind of like, forced to speak to each other. In every other class, you're in a big lecture hall. And if you, like, were to try and talk to the person next year, they might not be like, they might be focused on their work. Whereas in this, there's topics you have to talk about, and you're put in groups”

Others wanted to have a module that was *less intense* than some of their other course work to allow them some balance across the semester.

“It was nicer than doing like, like, a module that has like exams at the end and very academic. It was nice to have like a break, where it's just kind of relaxed”

4.4 Suggested Improvements

A number of issues were addressed by students when asked to consider how the module could be improved. Some students that they would like to have access to more resources on the Design Your Life resources.

“I think there wasn't access to the content. Because I know there's the design your life book. And I got it and I was reading it. That's very good. And then although there's no extra reading or anything to understand the stuff that you don't understand. So I was thinking, its hard to connect to the slides sometimes”

For some, they reported they would have liked more time to gain greater clarity on each tool and its practical application.

Some things were really vague. Like, the energy map. I never really got that like, like. We did it. And there was no like, this is how you should apply it or anything. It was kind of just a quick little activity”

Given the in-depth subject matter of some of the tools, some students felt it was difficult to share their perspectives in group sessions at the start of the module, before they got to know other their fellow students.

It looks like you're asked to discuss your goals in life with people, but you don't know them. So, I think I thought that was hard like, somebody you've never spoken too before. And then you tell them about your goals for the future. Whereas now we're all kind of know each other a bit but not at the beginning

The timing of the course was noted as not particularly convenient as it was scheduled for Wednesday evenings 4pm to 6pm and as such was a bit late for class. However, it was also noted that it was helpful to be able to leave a few minutes early if the work allotted for that session was completed.

4.5 Giving Feedback

The students were asked about how they preferred to give their feedback on their experiences. They gave a range of responses. Some indicated a preference for focus groups where they could talk issues through. One student would prefer to get one email inviting feedback rather than multiple communications. While some students felt it was safer to complete an anonymous survey, other students reported that they felt completing surveys was not effective in addressing issues they had raised previously.

4.6 Digital Storytelling

Students were asked to share their experience of completing the digital story. Firstly, students were asked to complete the sentence, “Digital Storytelling is...” One student replied, it's kind of awkward!

One identifiable issue was that It was difficult for them to imagine completing a task about how the course impacted their life. The fact that the parameters of the assignment changed during the module also caused some uncertainty.

“It was kind of like expecting us to do this whole video on design your life. I was like, again, you know, it's not that it didn't have a big impact, but it didnt at the same time, not enough to do this whole story on how it changed my life and how I'll do this stuff with it in the future. And then he's kind of like oh, well you can do whatever you like. And then someone else says we do have to do on how to design your life changed your life. Just kind of a bit, where do you even start with that video, I don't know it could have been just said a bit better.

However, they were equally clear that they did not want to present in public because it was personal information and they didn't know the people in the room

“I think at the start, like we all thought that you had to present it. And then when he was kind of saying, like, you do it on something personal? You don't really know the people in the room that you're presenting something personal to”

At the time of the focus group, students were still completing the story and suggested it would be helpful to have technical support and an assignment template to help make their digital story as for most it involved using new applications.

“I was wondering maybe it's something that during the class, you could do it on, you know, in a lab. Like, going through the titles, what they mean, for each section, you know. There's the framework online, but also, giving different ideas of what people use like PowerPoint, the video editing things, because not everyone uses video editors and don't know what's the right

one, even though they said that you can use any but still like, you don't want to do the wrong type of video never mind, have to have the right content. Yeah, maybe a set format would make the scariness go away, or like two different options instead of whatever you want. Even though, wherever you want, it's good for everyone because we have different laptops”

There was one student who really enjoyed learning this new skill and was interested in developing it further.

“After doing the digital story of like, editing videos and stuff for the fun like, you know, Photoshop and stuff and it's kind of fun”

4.7 Teaching Team Review

A draft report based on these findings was circulated to the teaching team for review. In a follow up session with the evaluator, the team identified the following amendments they would like to make to the next iteration of the module based on this feedback.

- *Student Handbook:* The team suggested that copies of a proforma Design your Life resource book is sourced and shared with each student taking the module. This would ensure that students had their own copy of the various tools and templates. In this way, the students would have greater opportunity to understand and deploy the various tools involved in the course. Additional teaching time on the module can then be deployed during sessions providing clarification to students on the various tools and their application.
- *Linkages between the module and student success coaching:* The team noted that while a number of students accessed the module after attending for 1 to 1 coaching that further linkages could be developed between the supports offered by the coaches and the module. This could be achieved through providing 1 to 1 support on the strengths-based

tool. In addition, they could attend a coaching appointment for support with one of the DYL tools included in their handbook.

- *Recruitment of students:* The team would like to improve the processes for the recruitment of students. This issue will be explored further with both the student success coach intern and the transdisciplinary lecturer, David Doolin to develop additional strategies.
- *Reflection as a methodology:* It was noted that a majority of the students may not be familiar with reflective practice assignments. The team would like to include additional opportunities in the module for students to practice this type of assignment. This will be of value as a learning activity but also will support the students across the module.
- *Digital Storytelling:* Following concerns raised by the students on sharing their digital story publicly, it is clear that it is not appropriate to ask students to include these artifacts as planned as an evaluation output. A number of students may choose to consent to sharing their video with the evaluator once the module is completed. A separate call will be made for this at the end of next semester, retrospectively seeking volunteers across both iterations of the module. However, the team do intend incorporating and developing this aspect of the course assessment next semester. They plan to do this by arranging a drop in opportunity for students to access one of the teaching team in a lab setting to get support with the apps/programmes used to compile the story. They will also clarify that the focus on the assignment should be limited to their feedback on the module and how it has impacted on their self-awareness and outlook.

5 Reflections, implications, and future research trajectory

During this past semester, the first DYL in curriculum module was successfully delivered to a cohort of students. In the focus group as part of the evaluation, the students indicated that this

was a positive experience and that they would recommend participation to other students. They found the DYL tools interesting and could identify that participation helped them to be creative, to learn decision making and planning tools that would be of use to them as they plan the next stages of their lives and careers.

This type of module was valued by students because of the opportunities to meet and get to know other students. Most reported that they did not have access to this type of opportunity in their wider course. They also acknowledged the importance of getting to know university staff and would feel better able to talk to the staff they have met through this module.

It was striking that students referred a number of times to the lack of opportunities they had to get to know other students and the wider university community. This course was valued for facilitating socialisation. This sense of lack of connection was surprising and should be explored further.

As this was the first delivery of the module, the students did suggest some course improvements. These included providing access to course resources and more opportunities to deepen their understanding of the DYL tools. While there is probably room to create more “practice” opportunities within the course for students to develop a deeper understanding of the tools, it is notable that they did worry about exploring some of these topics with other students they did not know very well. Creating a safe space and fostering a sense of a DYL community is probably a pre-requisite for facilitating full engagement for students with the DYL materials and approaches.

The students also made some helpful suggestions about publicising the module which should be considered, perhaps with the involvement of interns working with the student success coach team.

A nuanced set of feedback emerged on the use of Digital Storytelling. While the assignment parameters did change during the course in response to student feedback, there was a sense that further technical support and advice would have been useful to help them complete their work. The scale of the assignment was also a challenge as some students could see that while the module did impact them, they were unsure whether it impacted them sufficiently to focus a digital story on that topic alone. It should also be noted that some students really enjoyed learning this new skill.

However, there was a clear preference to restrict the viewing of the completed story to the course team. Students did not want to risk sharing something that was personal with other students that they did not know.

The teaching team have considered this feedback and plan to make a number of programme developments in response when the module is next delivered. Student feedback on the collection processes will inform both the collection of data with students next semester and also the wider Designing Futures evaluation.

This first iteration of accredited Life Design has enabled us to pilot assessment and evaluation of same. We have, as a consequence, been able to answer some key questions about the impact of Life Design and how it can be assessed and evaluated with students; but we also take forward important questions which will help us to add further depth and nuance to our evaluation approach, as we refine, develop expand Life Design within the university curriculum.

6 Conclusion

Life design will become more popular as the demand for managing and proactively designing transitions increases. We offer a first attempt to bring together ways to measure the effects of life design in a conceptual framework. Through our initial design, deployment and evaluation

of Life Design within our curriculum, as part of the wider Designing Futures programme, we have been able to identify key aspects that need to be assessed and evaluated, and furthermore how this can be undertaken with and for learners. As well as helping to illustrate the impact of Life Design in the university, this has also provided important ideas for nuancing and enhancing further our evaluation plans as we develop the innovation in its next iterations. With this paper and ensuing assessment and evaluation, we hope to inform, align, and motivate future research efforts in life design and transition management. This will help to develop and augment our understanding of how to innovate learning and teaching in higher education, enabling our students to discern better-informed life and career pathways through engagement in programmes like Life Design; thus potentially transforming business for good.

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