

Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education by Caralyn Zehnder, Cynthia Alby, Karynne Kleine, and Julia Metzker

Contents

Biography	2
Review by Zhaoyi Zhang.....	3
Review by Jennifer R. Meadows	8
Audio Interview by Bonni Stachowiak	11
Discussion Questions	12
Discussion Themes.....	12

Biography

Caralyn Zehnder

Caralyn Zehnder is a senior lecturer in biology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Zehnder facilitates course design workshops that help participants use evidence-based teaching practice that utilize the most recent research in education, cognitive psychology, and the social sciences to build learning environments that contribute to important student learning.

Karynne L.M. Kleine

Karynne L M Kleine came later to her career in education, which has now fascinated her for 35 years. As a former dean and current professor of education, Kleine collaborates alongside her colleagues at Georgia College as well as nationally to address issues of inequity, particularly that serve to limit life choices. She has examined many of the taken-for-granted-assumptions about teaching, learning, and how the world works in order to internalize her understanding of human nature and its intersection with growth and progress of the collective.

Cynthia Alby

Cynthia Alby has spent most of her career immersed in what could most accurately be described as “avid cross-discipline idea synthesizing.” She studies pedagogy, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, and economics – anything that might yield useful clues to improving the art and science of teaching. Her primary research question is, “How might we re-enchant learning for both students and faculty?” She joined Georgia College in 2001, where she is now a professor of teacher education and works extensively with the Center for Teaching and Learning. She is also the lead developer for Georgia’s Governor’s Teaching Fellows.

Julia Metzker

Julia Metzker serves as the director of the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education at The Evergreen State College. During her journey of discovering herself as an educator, she was fortunate to find a cohort of like-minded university educators who cofounded the Innovative Course-building Group (IC-bG)—a grassroots social network for learning that supports teaching faculty and staff across disciplines. She believes in reimagining and reclaiming the democratic potential of assessment, work she champions as a member of the imagining America’s “Assessing the Practices of Public scholarship” research group.

Source: **Faculty Focus**



<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/reclaiming-the-joy-of-teaching/>

Review by Zhaoyi Zhang

Book review – Learning That Matters

April 30, 2022

Summary

In this book, “learning” covers multiple layers of meaning, including learning theories, learning outcomes and assessments, course design, teaching strategies and techniques, etc. As educators who will pursue careers at universities or are already teaching in higher education, no matter whether you are novice or senior, this book provides scaffolding for you from three aspects: a). how to design transformative lessons, how to create successful transformative learning experiences for students, and how to shape the identity of the transformative teacher.

This book consists of 10 chapters. And each chapter is completed by a team of four brilliant and professional educators who have specific disciplinary expertise. Collaboration is constantly brought up in the book. Whether it is the way the book is written or the various activities that are recommended throughout the book, readers will find traces of collaboration. This is the element that the authors are proud of.

Each chapter of the book covers ample content and inspiration. Chapter one (“Teaching Matters”) begins with the challenges that American higher education is facing in the present era, which include unequal distribution of educational resources, teachers who are very productive in research but weak in pedagogical knowledge, unequal power relations between “Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and their White counterparts” (p. 2), and the lack of capacity of higher education institutions to respond quickly to unexpected situations (e.g. Covid-19). All these problems are calling for changes in course design. The authors mention that educators in higher education institutions should regard exposing all of their students to transformative learning experiences as their teaching goal. This chapter also contains the introduction for all four authors and their beliefs about course design and teachers’ professional development. At the end of this chapter, the authors provide a guide to using this book so that readers can get insights into how to get the most out of this book.

In chapter two (“From the Foundation Up”), the authors firstly mention that trying to turn the classroom into a base for transformative education requires fostering creativity, and that means a degree of “improvisation” (p.18). This chapter provides four important concepts and principles for supporting this improvisation. The first one is about equity. The authors extract decentering pedagogy from critical theory, starting from no longer viewing students “within a deficit framework” (p. 27) and cherishing all students’ funds of knowledge, the authors then propose pedagogical approaches that promote equity. The second concept is aimed at the constructivist approach. In this section, by explaining the crucial role of constructivism in acquiring knowledge, the authors remind readers that students in the classroom are not just passive recipients, and transformative education cannot be teacher-centered. The third concept emphasizes creativity in promoting students’ engagement. The authors point out that the

course focusing on active learning could be helpful to students' scores. It is vital for teachers to understand how motivation influences learning. The fourth concept, therefore, focuses on the role of motivation. In this part, the question of whether students are motivated by mastery or performance goals is discussed. In the end, the authors hope teachers who have already built their teaching foundations could think about how to connect these concepts and theories with students' deep learning.

In chapter three ("Design Matter"), the authors shift the center from concepts to practical issues, focusing on course design. The aim of this chapter is trying to convince teachers that using design to guide teaching can be a very beneficial thing for both teachers and students. Additionally, the authors provide three complementary and connected designing approaches for teachers, which are design thinking, backward design, and universal design for learning (UDL). In short, design thinking is human/student-centered. It firstly needs teachers to develop empathy and collect students' information before class, then anticipates the kinds of problems they will encounter in their classes, lists the worst possible outcomes for their classes, and find out the solutions in advance. This approach offers a framework for planning courses that are closely tied to the student experience. Backward design is a course design approach guided by learning objectives, which requires teachers to think about what students need most to be successful. For UDL, it is an approach considering serving more students. It aims at establishing a learning environment to support students' diversity. In the end, the authors mention that the strategies provided in this chapter are important and will be repeatedly mentioned in the following chapters.

Chapter four ("Portable Outcomes") is about portable outcomes, which means that students can take what they learn in one class to subsequent classes, and even to later work and life, rather than outcomes that are forgotten once the test is completed. In this chapter, the authors begin by differentiating the definition of student learning outcomes (SLOs) and aspirational goals. Compared with aspirational goals which could be long-term and ideal, SLOs are more specific and measurable, which refer to as knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Before introducing how to design SLOs, the authors demonstrate the "alignment" between SLOs and "the coherence students experience" in the classroom. (p.83). Then, the authors give suggestions for how to write substantive SLOs. They should be student-centered, measurable, interlude, and inclusive. Specifically, students are able to know what they should anticipate from the course, and realize how they will perform in class to meet the outcomes. In addition, the authors mention that substantive SLOs should take affection into consideration, which means that teachers should present clearly what they want their students to care about after finishing the course. What is more, well-de-signed SLOs should also care about students' diversity so as to avoid biases. In the end, the authors advocate that after encompassing the above four characteristics, a truly portable goal must be to help students achieve higher order thinking skills that include analyzing and evaluating.

Chapter five provides an approach, which is also a framework, called the Dilemma, Issue, or Question Approach (DIQ). The authors summarize it as an approach to connecting subject knowledge with social issues. Teachers utilize this approach to guide students using the knowledge they have learnt in class to solve real social problems. The authors point out that by doing this, students can more easily

understand the usefulness of the knowledge and the reason why they need to learn it. In this chapter, multiple resources including reference websites and books are given to help readers think about how to design their DIQ framework. The authors also focus on describing the four steps of designing DIQ from brainstorming to getting feedback. It is important to summarize from the authors that DIQ breaks the status quo that critical thinking skill is only limited to “elitist activity” (p. 114).

In Chapter six (“Connected Assessment”), the authors spend a great deal of time explaining assessment-related knowledge. The significance of this chapter is evident in the way that it helps address teachers’ ongoing focus on what a few students can-not do, in suggesting that teachers need to think about how to support the progress of all students, and in the need to recognize the strengths that each individual brings to the classroom. The authors start by expressing their concerns about unequal issues brought about by today’s assessments. In the next part, instead of explaining “assessment jargon”, the authors present assessment along “two continuums”, which are from connected to unconnected assessment, and from summative to formative assessment. In terms of comparing unconnected and connected assessment, the authors interpret connected assessment as the one which underlines the growth and achievements of students. It is aligned with SLOs with a stepped increase in difficulty as a way to see students’ progress. The authors also compare formative and summative assessment and suggest that formative assessment is not done by scoring at the end, but by collecting and using the information obtained during the learning process to change and improve students’ learning process. It is a relatively fair way of assessing. The rest of the chapter is reserved for how to provide effective feedback to students, which also contains the forms, focuses, rubrics that teachers need to pay attention to when they give feedback.

Chapter seven (“The Power of Projects”) involves some of the practical skills that teachers use to design classroom activities that can effectively engage students and are simultaneously convenient for teachers to give formative feedback. The authors start this chapter by explaining the reason for the popularity of project-based learning. Then, three characteristics that should be equipped by a good project are explained in detail by the authors, which are authentic, collaborative, and transparent. The authors give many examples of actual classroom activities to make these three characteristics more visual and tangible.

Chapter eight (“Strategies that Matters”) mentions teaching strategies which could lead to significant learning. The authors introduce a concept of high-quality strategies which should be “active and engaging, intrinsically motivating, sticky, and culturally affirming” (p.207). A good high-quality strategy does not have to meet all of these characteristics, but it does need to equip many of them. Next, the authors mention the need for teachers to develop different strategies at different stages of learning. The authors also give different and respective suggestions and activities that teachers can do to prepare students for learning, engage students in learning, discuss in the classroom, and make learning visible so that teachers can choose and implement them according to their own conditions and classroom conditions. This chapter concludes with a guide for readers to reflect on their own strategies and a summary of high-quality strategies so that readers will have a deeper understanding of what strategies can cause deep and significant learning.

In chapter nine (“Supporting Students”), how to provide targeted support to students to ensure their success, effectively address inequities in education, and ensure enduring learning is a core topic. The authors provide ideas from four perspectives. Firstly, teachers should guide students to find value in learning, which means that if students can understand the purpose of the course and tap into the value of the course, they can be more engaged. Secondly, the authors mention that by praising students for their efforts and scoring less, teachers should provide the support that allows students to be unafraid of challenges and setbacks, and allows students to develop a “growth mindset” (p.263). Thirdly, Teachers have the responsibility to make students find a sense of belonging in the classroom. Lastly, the authors mention the negative stereotype that students develop when they experience setbacks, which is also called “stereotype threat” in the chapter. It is important to help students reflect on their self-values to counter this stereotype.

As a summary and ending chapter, chapter ten (“Your Turn: Self- and Collective Efficacy”) plays a crucial role in helping reshape a transformative teacher’s identity. As was mentioned in Chapter two that innovation is vital for developing transformative education. The authors in this chapter introduce Bandura’s “collective-efficacy” to underline the significance of collaboration for innovation (p.281). At the same time, it is also important to build a community of mutual trust and respect for students, in which students can obtain the necessary skills. The authors also recommend that teachers join or establish teacher learning communities, or “communities of change agents”. There they can monitor and help each other to become qualified transformative educators (p.287).

Evaluation

The authors have succeeded in achieving the goal of improving and expanding teachers’ skill sets described at the beginning of the book. Especially when reading chapters 3-9, which encompass all the things educators should consider when designing a course.

The whole book is highly readable and interactive. As I took notes while reading, I found that I could easily extract the key information from each chapter and understand it without much difficulty. Another strength of the book is reflected in its writing structure. Each chapter begins with a Preflection in a box, which may be a thought-provoking question or a small survey, giving the reader a preliminary idea of the chapter’s content before they even start reading the text. Next, the authors list the activities they set up in this chapter and what they hope the reader will ultimately gain from the chapter’s contents. By doing this, the authors make the outcomes of the chapter transparent to readers, which allows the scrutiny from readers when they finish this chapter. In writing each chapter, instead of explaining theories and concepts, the authors present numerous activities, their own experiences, and evidence-based strategies. After presenting a piece of content, the authors set up a “reflect to learn” session, asking one or two questions to give readers a short buffer and reflection time before moving on to the next module to better consolidate what they have just read. Each chapter follows the same pattern, starting with Preflection and ending with ensuring that the readers can make the de-sign happen. With this step-by-step guidance, readers will become more and more confident and motivated.

Conclusion

Overall, facilitating students to find motivation and meaning in the university's classroom, acquiring the competence needed for the 21st century, realizing and addressing social inequities are goals that teachers should be committed to designing their courses, and that is also what this book is trying to help teachers achieve. As a guide book, *Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education* is suitable for both individual educators and a group, like a faculty study group, since collaboration is ceaselessly mentioned throughout the book. Teachers can also practice the activities and evidence-based strategies in the book in a selective manner.

References

- David V. J. Bell. (2016). Twenty-first Century Education: Transformative Education for Sustainability and Responsible Citizenship. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 18(1), 48-56.
- Robert D. Boyd & J. Gordon Myers. (1988). Transformative education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 7(4), 261-284.

Source: **Global Journal of Transformative Education**

Book review – learning that matters: A field guide to course design for transformative education

Zhang, Z. (2022, April 30). Book review – learning that matters: A field guide to course design for transformative education. *Global Journal of Transformative Education*, 3, 34-37.
<https://doi.org/10.14434/gjte.v3i1.34176>



Review by Jennifer R. Meadows

Review of the book Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education

2020

Deep and meaningful learning experiences do not just happen on their own. Rather, learning experiences must be thoughtfully designed and crafted. *Learning Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education* provides the support that higher education faculty need to positively impact instructional practice. The information provided in this text is built from research in education, cognitive science, psychology, and neuroscience as well as experience from faculty having accomplished their own transformative learning experiences. It is just what faculty members need to encourage their students to be active participants in their own learning.

The authors are all educators from unique disciplines, with various experiences to contribute to this text. Cynthia Alby earned a PhD in language education and is now a professor in teacher education at Georgia College. Karynne L. M. Kleine earned advanced degrees including an EdD in the history and philosophy of science/science education, and is a professor of education at Georgia College. Julia Metzker holds a doctoral degree in organic chemistry and is currently supporting faculty as the director of the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College. Caralyn Zehnder has a PhD in ecology and is now a lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The beginning of the text serves as a blueprint for what is to come in the remaining chapters. In Chapter 1, “Teaching Matters,” the authors outline the format for this book. It is constructed to be interactive. There are opportunities throughout for activities, reflection, and consulting other resources to extend learning. Faculty are challenged to work towards connecting knowledge and skills of their specific discipline to student application of that content. As an alternative to the traditional lecture format of imparting knowledge, students should be intentionally engaged in solving problems that relate to the real world around them. In this manner, faculty should strive to build in opportunities for collaboration between students in order for them to listen and learn from each other.

All remaining chapters begin with a pre-reflection. This is an activation technique used to guide readers in thinking about an idea or experience prior to delving deeper into understanding. The authors encourage readers to interact with the text both as an independent exercise and as a shared effort with colleagues. The chapters additionally are composed with a list of intended outcomes, *Reflect to Learn* prompts, *Make it Happen* activities, *Wonderful Resources to Extend Learning*, as well as sound guidance for faculty based on research and experience.

Anchor concepts are highlighted throughout Chapter 2, “From the Foundation Up,” along with the Teaching Practices Inventory. The authors created these anchor concepts by the experiences they have all had building courses in a manner they describe as “designing courses for students rather than for younger versions of ourselves.” These anchor concepts consist of *Teach Toward Equity*, *Construct and Connect*, *Engage Students Actively*, and *Motivation Matters*. The Teaching Practices Inventory (TPI) is

encouraged as a means to know your teaching perspective as a factor impacting your teaching practice.

Creating with the learner in mind is the goal of Chapter 3, “Design Matters.” Readers are directed to evaluate how to use design in course planning to support student success; to explore design thinking, backward design, and universal design for learning as complementary approaches to design; and to begin applying the principles of intentional design. Constructing an “empathy map” is proposed with the aim to articulate student perspectives on school, learning, and a specific course. The authors suggest that even before a course begins, the instructor should communicate a supportive vision by letting them know their success is your goal.

Chapter 4, “Portable Outcomes,” is focused on helping faculty to develop student-centered, higher-order, measurable, inclusive student learning outcomes (SLOs) that not only are important for success in a specific course but also transcend throughout a student’s education. Once written, SLOs should be shared with others for critical feedback and revision. The relationships of SLOs are discussed at the course- and module-level outcomes, and at the lesson level as objectives.

A prime example of moving away from a strictly lecture-based format is outlined in Chapter 5, “The Dilemma, Issue, or Question Approach.” In this approach, a class session is not simply a listen and learn situation with the instructor acting as a sage on the stage and the students as empty buckets being filled with wisdom. Instead, the instructor poses a dilemma, issue, or question prompting students to connect course content with real-world problems. In this way, students learn the content in a deeper and more meaningful way, going beyond being able to answer multiple choice questions on an exam.

Chapter 6, “Connected Assessment,” is a blend of examining the types and benefits of assessments used in the classroom along with developing a mindful and equitable assessment practice. Two continuums of assessment are explained: connected versus unconnected together with formative and summative. Connected assessments are aligned with SLOs, transparent in that students see their benefits, holistic in that they include multiple modes of evidence, and affirming in that students are able to demonstrate meeting the SLOs in multiple ways with opportunities for feedback, support, and improvement. Striving for a heavier emphasis on connected and formative assessments embedded in courses, the authors provide multiple examples and support to make this happen.

“The Power of Projects,” Chapter 7, was written to support readers in both designing and implementing relevant, collaborative, and transparent projects into their courses as a means for students to demonstrate their learning. As an extension of the previous chapter, which stressed the importance of formative assessment, this chapter gives readers a practical means to meaningfully engage students in learning while also allowing for checks for understanding. Again building on a previous chapter, this chapter suggests use of the “Dilemma, Issue, or Question Approach” as a way to start in designing a project. This chapter likewise stresses the importance of cooperative learning to benefit students in developing professional skills such as working with a diverse team, communicating effectively, and completing complex tasks.

So many practical supports! Chapter 8, “Strategies that Matter,” is a guide for readers to know what makes a strategy effective and how to distinguish between strategies of lower and higher quality. First, the authors lay out what makes a teaching strategy high quality. They continue on by sharing examples of high-quality strategies in the following four categories: preparing students for learning, engaging students with learning, using discussion in class, and making learning visible. Each example shares information about when the strategy is useful, how to implement the strategy, and tips for using the strategy.

Last, but not least, Chapter 9, “Supporting Students,” rounds out this text by delving into research about using targeted supports with students, selecting targeted supports for specific students, and prompting readers to reflect on their own teaching practice. The authors define targeted supports as “actions or activities that focus on specific educational issues by addressing the social-psychological processes that underlie those issues at key points in the educational process.” They further categorize these supports by their purpose: learners ascribe value to their learning; learners become confident in their capacity for growth; learners are secure members of a learning community; and learners connect with their values. Examples to use in the classroom are shared from each of the four categories.

Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education is a must-have text for new faculty and experienced faculty alike. From the personal stories from the authors’ own experiences to the connection to educational research, this text should be on the desk of all faculty in higher education.

Source: **Teachers College Record**

Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education Reviewed by Jennifer R. Meadows

Meadows, J. R. (2022). [Review of the book *Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education* by Caralyn Zehnder, Cynthia Alby, Karynne Kleine, and Julia Metzker]. *Teachers College Record*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/TCZ/Book%20Reviews%20Collection%202022/August%202022/Learning%20That%20Matters-1659715932.pdf>



Audio Interview by Bonni Stachowiak

Episode 391 – Learning That Matters with Caralyn Zehnder, Cynthia Alby, Julia Metzker & Karynne Kleine

December 9, 2021

Listen to this interview on the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast website:

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/learning-that-matters/>

Source: **Teaching in Higher Ed**

Stachowiak, B. (Host). (2021, December 9). *Learning That Matters* (Episode 391) [Audio podcast episode]. In Teaching in Higher Ed. <https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/learning-that-matters/>



Discussion Questions

1. Are the anchor concepts discussed on pp. 16-29 (Teach toward equity, Construct and connect, Engage student actively, and Motivation matters) already a part of your current teaching? What forms do they take in your classroom?
2. What are the barriers to learning in your current curriculum? How much impact will it have on you if you implement the Universal Design for Learning principles on pp. 48-49?
3. On p. 67, the authors wrote, “Portability means students will take their learning with them to the next class, through graduation, into their careers, and onto a lifetime of learning.” Have you had experience in your education, both as students and as teachers of assignments that led to portable learning?
4. How would you connect your course material to something timely and relevant in the news? What do you think would be your students’ response?
5. After reading the chapter on Connected Assessment, do you feel your own grading system contributes to the inequities your students face? Where would you place your assessments in the grid on p. 95? (Connected vs. Unconnected, Summative vs. Formative)
6. In group projects, how have you fostered collaboration, cooperation and interdependence skills? How would incorporating transparency into the design of the project affect the outcomes?
7. Which of the strategies discussed on p. 150 feel like something you can incorporate right away in your classrooms? Are there any potential problems or barriers you can foresee?

Discussion Themes

Pedagogy and Learning Design | Assessments and Grading | Inclusion | Student Engagement