HOW TO DESIGN ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR YOUR GENERATION ALPHA LEARNERS

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Abstract: *With the emergence of Generation Alpha (born between 2010 and the present), educators must reconsider how learning experiences are designed to match their needs, preferences, and digital environments. This article explores how to create engaging and effective learning experiences tailored to Generation Alpha's characteristics, emphasizing learner agency, technology integration, and real-life application. By addressing key questions related to lesson design, learner participation, and the development of soft skills, educators can enhance the learning process, making it meaningful, interactive, and future-oriented. The article also discusses the role of employability as a guiding principle, ensuring that learning experiences prepare students not just for school but for life beyond the classroom.*

Key Words: *Generation Alpha, learning experience design (LXD), soft skills, digital learning, gamification, employability, student agency, collaborative learning.*

What questions should we ask ourselves when planning lessons for Generation Alpha learners?

When new generations come, they bring with them their own characteristics, fears and hopes. The newest generation (Alpha, born between 2010 and the present) needs a learning experience specifically designed for them, one which they enjoy and that has real-life learning outcomes. This article will consider some questions

we can ask ourselves to help us design engaging learning experiences for Generation Alpha learners.

Who are Generation Alpha?

This generation have more shared global references than any other generation – music, celebrities, films and brands. They are often tech-savvy and tech-positive, and sometimes have rich experiences of co-creating something with others online, whether it be an amazing online game, a written chat under a post on social media or planning for an event using messaging apps.

Is learning an experience?

Learning is a journey that is full of pleasant and painful experiences – hopefully more pleasant than painful, for both teachers and learners. Learning experiences include the subject matter plus a range of soft skills required for living in the world today. Our learners need these soft skills, such as critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. By creating engaging learning experiences, we can help learners increase their own role and agency in learning, and to reflect on what works for them.

Can we design learning experiences?

Learning experiences are best if they are designed in detail. Am I talking about lesson planning? Lesson planning is part of it, but we can go one step further. If our lesson plans take into account who we are teaching, what learning objectives we are following up and how the stages of a lesson integrate smoothly, learning experience design (LXD) bridges the gap between what is going to be taught (the message) and our learners (who the message is intended to be sent to). We might discover more of its mechanics and dynamics in future articles, but let's consider these questions as a start.

1.   How do I like my learners to feel during the lesson? For example, comfortable, curious, amazed, etc.

2.   When will this lesson be most useful in my learners' everyday life? For instance, when writing a project report, while playing an online game or at the doctor's.

3.   How much learner participation is included within the whole class time? For example, learners doing role plays, doing collaborative writing online or an interactive quiz.

4.   Which soft skills am I going to raise awareness of, review and practise as this lesson is taking place? For instance, empathy, accountability and collaboration.

5.   How is this lesson going to be extended beyond the classroom walls/screens? For example, while doing a DIY task at home at the weekend, while having an online interview before starting college or when posting on social networking sites.

How should we design an engaging learning experience for our Generation Alpha learners?

I have noticed in my informal and formal talks to teachers and parents that there is sometimes a kind of fear about teaching this age group.

What is Generation Alpha's world like? We teachers usually take into account our learners' future. Which future are we designing their learning journey for? Which experiences of success or vulnerability does that learning journey call for? How can learners help their own learning? How could we make the most of their world to help create learning that is fun and fruitful? What will future jobs be like, and are our lessons good preparation?

Let the concept of 'employability' be our guide in the exciting task of designing learning experiences for Generation Alpha learners. Employability is a good choice since it does not only focus on employment but also includes study prior to employment (school and college life) and life experiences resulting from that career journey. I believe designing learning experiences for our learners should:

- scaffold life skills that are necessary in the world of today and the future

- be co-created with learners, to ensure learner agency; they like it when they are given responsibility for their own learning.

- borrow from their world; consider their likes, dislikes, digital devices, gamification, kinaesthetic motors, etc. (you add to the list upon the reflection of your best experiences teaching Generation Alpha learners)

- Offer experiences that have effective learning outcomes for study and work as well as being enjoyable for them.

Having already posed several questions, here are a few more to consider as we think more about how to create engaging learning experiences for these learners.

1. Do you agree that your young learners today are different from the ones you had ten years ago? Are you grateful for the amazing job you have in which you meet and work with new generations?

2. Do you agree that life today is not very comparable with ten years ago? Many of the services we use today were not even imaginable in those days.

3. Have you also noticed that lesson planning is not enough for our classes? We need something next to it to help planning of our classes be more customised for the learners in that class.

4. Do you agree that learning a language is the best way to learn some transferable soft skills as well? Language work offers many opportunities for the delivery and practice of those skills, which can be transferred to life, study and work afterwards.

5. When did you last stop on the street to look at the simple yet considered design of a furniture item in a shop window? Why did you like it so much? This is a good point to begin from.

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