60-Second SoTL

Episode 77 – Empowering Students' Future Planning for Success

Featured Article

Hsu, Wan-Chen. 2026. "From Identity Exploration to Future Planning: Empowering Students for Success." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 14: 1-19. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.14.6

Transcript

(Music)

0:10

Jessie L. Moore:
How can we help students move toward more intentional future planning for who they want to become? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In "From Identity Exploration to Future Planning: Empowering Students for Success," Wan-Chen Hsu examines a career-planning course designed to support university students' identity exploration, intrinsic motivation, and future planning. Their article appears in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, an open-access journal.

0:48

Hsu's study took place at the National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology in Taiwan and explored how a structured pedagogical intervention might help students better understand themselves, connect their academic experiences to future goals, and develop more intentional learning plans. Identity exploration can help students align their personal values and professional aspirations, navigate external pressures impacting their career planning, and develop resilience. Hsu's study asks what happens when educators intentionally design a course to support identity exploration.

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The course, called *Designing Your Life*, was a liberal arts general education career-planning course built around design thinking. Hsu and an undergraduate student co-created the intervention, which guided students through five design-thinking stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Across the semester, students completed a range of activities to support self-exploration and planning. These included an identity exploration scale administered as a pre- and post-test; an MBTI personality assessment; a personal SWOT analysis;

worksheets about work and life values and industry trends; weekly behavior tracking and reflection; a personal learning plan; and interviews with industry experts related to students' professional interests.

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Hsu used descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, and thematic analysis to systematically explore the complete course material samples from 28 students.

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One especially interesting part of the course involved students' personal weekly behavior and reflection logs. Students tracked how they spent their time across academics, social life, and leisure, and they rated their focus, effort, and whether they experienced "flow"—a state of deep immersion and engagement.

For Hsu's students, flow was relatively rare. Out of 160 recorded behaviors, only about 12 percent were associated with a flow state. When students did experience flow, their focus and energy expenditure were significantly higher. Those moments of flow tended to happen in three kinds of activities: learning and professional development, social and interpersonal interactions, and hobbies or recreational activities. But the logs also revealed difficulties with exam-related stress and a lack of intrinsic motivation.

3:16

Students' personal learning plans added another layer to the picture. Most first and second year students focused on academic and professional development goals. For third and fourth year students, their goals and strategies shifted toward career development and internship preparation. While students generally had a clear sense of their goals, they often struggled with time-management and self-regulatory habits. In other words, motivation was present—but action was harder.

3:41

Industry expert interviews were another powerful aspect of the course intervention. Students interviewed professionals in fields related to their interests, and those interviews helped them better understand workplace expectations. Nearly all students recognized the importance of continuous learning and career planning. Their interviews appeared to help students connect classroom learning to the realities of work. They also encouraged students to think more flexibly and more concretely about their futures.

4:06

Pre- and post-test findings from quantitative assessments offered a nuanced view of identity exploration. The study measured three dimensions: breadth exploration, depth exploration, and ruminative exploration. Breadth and depth showed small, nonsignificant increases after the course. The more complicated finding involved ruminative exploration. Hsu describes students as becoming more engaged in questioning and reflecting on their futures, suggesting that the course prompted a deeper and more complex process of self-exploration rather than a simple, linear increase in clarity.

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Hsu's study ultimately suggests that courses focused on life design and career planning can do meaningful work when they combine self-reflection, structured planning, peer dialogue, and contact with professionals. But the study also reminds us that students need more than encouragement. They need scaffolding that helps them translate insight into action: time-management support, opportunities for reflection, meaningful connections between coursework and life goals, and pedagogies that make learning feel purposeful.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

5:13

(Music)

5:18

Jessie Moore:
Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

(Music)